SAMGUK YUSA

(THE FIRST VOLUME)

Translation and Research Notes

From the Original Text by Iryeon (1281–1288)

Ancient Accounts of the Three Kingdoms of Korea
Silla • Goguryeo • Baekje

三國遺事

권제일 · 기이편

By
David Lee Fernandes

Preface

The pages that follow are not a scholarly translation of the Samguk Yusa (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms). They are the text of a journey.

My work has never begun with modern interpretations. I have always preferred to return to the oldest texts available and read them as directly as possible. Scholars, archaeologists, and historians provide valuable perspectives, but my primary interest has always been the source itself.

Rather than beginning with modern explanations, I sought first to observe what repeatedly appears within the stories. As the pages accumulated, recurring motifs began to emerge: heavenly lights, sacred mountains, strange arrivals, prophetic dreams, sea crossings, animal messengers, ancestral spirits, dragons, eggs, chests, and children emerging from enclosed containers.

These motifs were texted alongside the translations. The purpose was not to prove a predetermined conclusion, but to identify recurring structures preserved within the text itself. Whether one interprets these stories as mythology, religious symbolism, cultural memory, political allegory, or something else entirely, the patterns deserve attention.

Throughout this work I have attempted to allow the text to speak before explaining it. Where possible, the original story is presented first, followed by observations and notes. Some of these observations align with conventional interpretations. Others explore possibilities that modern scholarship may not emphasize. All are offered in the spirit of inquiry rather than certainty.

Ancient texts are often approached as collections of facts to be verified or myths to be dismissed. I have come to see them differently. They are vessels of memory, carrying fragments of how earlier peoples understood their world, their origins, their fears, and their hopes. Whether historical, symbolic, or something in between, these stories survived because generation after generation believed they were worth preserving.

The monk Iryeon preserved them because he believed they mattered. These notes are an effort to listen carefully to what he preserved.

— David Lee Fernandes

The Book of Wei

According to the Book of Wei, approximately two thousand years ago Dangun Wanggeom established his capital at Asadal. In the gyeong (ancient commentary), this location is identified as Muyeopsan, also called Baegak, situated in Baekju. It lay east of Gaeseong, and the text states that the present-day Baegak Palace occupies that location. There Dangun established his capital, founded the nation, and named it Joseon. This event is said to have occurred during the reign of Emperor Yao of China.

Long before this, Hwanung, the second son of Hwanin, desired to descend into the human world and govern its people. Recognizing his son's aspiration, Hwanin looked down upon the region of Samwi Taebaeksan. Seeing that it was a land well suited to benefiting humanity, he entrusted Hwanung with the Three Cheonbuin (천부인), sacred heavenly seals or divine objects symbolizing heavenly authority, and permitted him to descend to govern the world.

Hwanung descended with a retinue of three thousand followers beneath the sacred sandalwood tree at the summit of Taebaeksan, identified in this text as present-day Myohyangsan. Upon his arrival he established a place called Sinsi (신시), meaning the Divine City. From that time he became known as Hwanung Cheonwang, the Heavenly King Hwanung.

Assisted by Pungbaek, the Master of Wind, Usa, the Master of Rain, and Unsa, the Master of Clouds (in some traditions), Hwanung governed more than 360 aspects of human life, including agriculture, lifespan, illness, justice, punishment, and the distinction between good and evil. Through these responsibilities he ruled and instructed the human world.

At that time a bear and a tiger lived together within the same cave. Both continually prayed to Hwanung, asking to become human. Hwanung gave them a bundle of sacred mugwort and twenty cloves of garlic, saying:

"If you eat these and do not see the sunlight for one hundred days, you will become human."

The bear and the tiger accepted the offering and followed his instructions. After three sevens (twenty-one days), the bear faithfully observed the taboo and transformed into a woman. The tiger, however, failed to endure the restriction and was unable to complete the transformation.

The woman, known as Ungnyeo (the Bear Woman), had no husband. Each day she prayed beneath the sacred altar tree, asking to conceive a child. Hwanung then temporarily assumed human form and took Ungnyeo as his wife. From this union a son was born. That son was Dangun Wanggeom.

The text further states that in the gyeongin year, identified as the fiftieth year after Emperor Tang Yao ascended the throne, Dangun established his capital at Pyeongyang Fortress (identified as present-day Seogyeong) and formally named the country Joseon.

Later, Dangun transferred the capital to Asadal on Baegaksan Mountain. This mountain is also recorded under several other names, including Gungholsan, Gungja, Bangjang, and Geummidal. From this capital he is said to have ruled for approximately 1,500 years.

In the gimyo year, when King Wu of Zhou ascended the throne, Gija was enfeoffed in Joseon. Following this event Dangun relocated to Jangdang-gyeong, situated at the foot of Guwolsan Mountain.

He later returned to Asadal, withdrew from public life, and eventually became a mountain spirit (sanshin). The account concludes by stating that Dangun lived to the remarkable age of 1,908 years.

The Biography of Pei Ju from the Tang period records an additional tradition:

Goguryeo was originally Gojuk-guk, identified as present-day Haeju. When the Zhou dynasty granted Gija authority over the region, it came to be known as Joseon. Later, during the Han dynasty, the territory was divided into the Three Commanderies: Xuantu (Hyeondo), Lelang (Nakrang), and Daifang (Daebang).

Notes:

Divine descent, Hwanung descends from the heavenly realm to Taebaeksan with 3,000 followers.

Sacred heavenly objects, Hwanin gives Hwanung three Cheonbuin, heavenly seals or talismans containing divine authority.

Sacred tree / landing site, Hwanung descends beneath the Sindansu, the divine altar-tree, and establishes Sinsi, the Divine City.

Weather-command beings, Hwanung brings Wind Master and Rain Master, suggesting sky/weather control as part of rulership.

Civilizing mission, Hwanung governs 360 human affairs: crops, lifespan, illness, punishment, good and evil.

Cave initiation / no sunlight taboo, bear and tiger enter a controlled transformation process involving darkness, sacred plants, and time.

Animal-to-human transformation, the bear becomes Ungnyeo, Bear-Woman.

Temporary human form, Hwanung “temporarily becomes human.

Sacred conception, Ungnyeo prays beneath the sacred tree, then conceives through union with Hwanung.

Founder birth, Dangun is born from a sky-being and transformed earth-being union.
Long reign / mythic time, Dangun rules for 1,500 years, which places him in sacred rather than ordinary historical time.

Comparable figures appear globally:

- Thoth-Tehuti — departs the Isle of Flame (Atlantis/Azores) after the deluge, bringing administrative, linguistic, and astronomical knowledge to the Nile delta.
- Quetzalcoatl — the white-robed civilizer arriving by sea in the east of Mesoamerica, teaching calendar, agriculture, and governance.
- Viracocha — emerging from Lake Titicaca’s waters after a great darkness to remake humankind.

Thematic Axis	**Thoth (Tehuti)**	**Hwanung (환웅)**	**Quetzalcoatl**	**Viracocha**	**Shared Function / Symbol**
Descent	Arrives from the "Isle of Flame," envoy of Ra	Descends from Heaven with 3 000 followers to Taebaek-san	Descends from the sky in radiant form, the feathered serpent	Emerges from Lake Titicaca after the deluge	Post-diluvian arrival of a luminous teacher
Role	Scribe, engineer, legislator	Moral law-giver, civil founder	Civilizer, bringer of maize, calendar, art	Creator, architect of humanity	Technocratic restorer of order
Symbols	Ibis stylus, moon disc	Wind, rain, cloud; Sindansu tree	Feathered serpent; wind and dawn	Sun-staff, luminous robe	Elemental mastery — air, light, water
Ethos	Ma-a-t (truth/ order)	Heavenly virtue and justice	Balance, non-violence, wisdom	Compassion and creation	Cosmic ethics as civil order
Departure	Withdraws into Duat	Returns to Heaven	Sails east on raft of serpents; promises return	Walks west over sea; promises return	The departed teacher motif — cyclical return
Cultural Aftermath	Egypt's scholarly priesthood	Gojoseon's moral kingship	Toltec & Aztec priest-scientists	Incan concept of divine kingship	Institutional continuity of knowledge
Elemental Axis	Water / Writing	Air / Weather	Air / Fire (Wind + Light)	Water / Sun	Each governs an element in balance — the Four Directions

The Han Campaign Against Wiman Joseon

According to the account, the conflict began during the period of the State of Yan. Jinbeon Joseon was invaded and occupied by Yan. Yan Shigu explains that during the Warring States period, Yan first conquered this territory, established officials to administer it, and constructed defensive fortresses along the frontier.

After the Qin dynasty conquered Yan, Jinbeon Joseon was incorporated into the frontier region of Liaodong. When the Han dynasty later came to power, the court determined that the territory was too distant and difficult to defend effectively. Rather than extending its administration farther east, it repaired the existing frontier fortifications in Liaodong and established the Paesu River (identified as the Cheongcheon River) as the official boundary.

Yan Shigu further notes that the Paesu River lay within Lelang Commandery and that Jinbeon Joseon had become subordinate to Yan.

During this period, Lu Wan, the King of Yan, rebelled against the Han and fled to the Xiongnu. Among those who accompanied this migration was a man named Wiman, who led more than one thousand followers into exile. Departing from the eastern frontier fortress, he crossed the Paesu River and settled at Sanghajang, an abandoned Qin frontier fortress.

Over time Wiman gathered together the indigenous peoples of Jinbeon Joseon, along with refugees from the former states of Yan and Qi. As his influence steadily increased, he established himself as king and founded his capital at Wanggeom.

The location of Wanggeom is explained through differing traditions preserved within the text. Li regarded Wanggeom simply as the name of the capital, while Chen Zan identified Wanggeom Fortress as lying east of the Paesu River within Lelang Commandery.

With the strength of his growing army, Wiman conquered the surrounding smaller settlements and compelled them to submit. Both Jinbeon and Imdun accepted his authority, and the territory under his control expanded to several thousand ri.

After Wiman's death, the throne passed to his son and eventually to his grandson, Ugeo. Yan Shigu identifies Ugeo specifically as Wiman's grandson.

During Ugeo's reign, representatives from Jinbeon and Jin-guk submitted petitions requesting permission to travel and pay tribute before the Son of Heaven, the Emperor of Han. Ugeo, however, refused to permit their passage, effectively blocking diplomatic contact between these states and the Han court.

In response, the Han dynasty dispatched an envoy named She He to persuade Ugeo to reopen communication. The mission proved unsuccessful, and Ugeo refused the proposal.

As She He returned toward Han territory and reached the border at the Paesu River, he ordered the driver of his carriage to kill the Joseon official who had been escorting him. The text refers to this escort as the biwang, a subordinate king or regional military leader. Yan Shigu records that the escort's personal name was Jang.

After crossing the Paesu River, She He entered the frontier fortress and reported the incident to the Han court.

The Son of Heaven rewarded She He by appointing him Eastern Commandant of Liaodong. Joseon, however, regarded his actions with hostility. Soon afterward they launched a surprise attack and killed him.

In response, the Han court organized a large military expedition against Joseon.

Yang Bok (also rendered Yang Pu) was appointed Tower-Ship General and led a fleet from Qi across the Balhae Sea (Yellow Sea). His expeditionary force numbered approximately 50,000 troops.

At the same time, the Left General Sunche (Xun Zhi) advanced overland from Liaodong to attack Ugeo from the west.

Ugeo mobilized his forces to resist the invasion.

The Tower-Ship General's fleet reached Wanggeom Fortress first, landing with an advance force of approximately 7,000 soldiers from Qi. Ugeo initially remained within the fortress, but upon realizing that the invading force was relatively small, he launched an immediate counterattack.

The Joseon forces defeated the Han advance contingent, forcing the Tower-Ship General's army to retreat from the battlefield.

Notes:

These pages are more historical-political than mythic, but several research motifs still matter.

Mountain-spirit transformation, Dangun does not simply die; he returns to Asadal and becomes a mountain god/spirit. This completes the Dangun arc as: heavenly descent → founder birth → ancient rule → withdrawal into sacred mountain form.

Sacred geography / contested geography, Asadal, Baegak, Pyeongyang, Paesu, Liaodong, Lelang, and Wanggeom Fortress are all treated as layered memory-sites with competing identifications.

Boundary river motif, the Paesu River becomes a political and symbolic boundary: crossing it marks exile, invasion, diplomacy, betrayal, and war.

Refugee-founder motif, Wiman is an outsider/refugee who crosses a boundary, gathers displaced peoples, and becomes king.

Blocked passage motif, Ugeo prevents Jinbeon and Jin-guk from reaching the Son of Heaven, turning geography into political control.

Envoy-killing / border violence, She He kills a Joseon escort at the river boundary, then is later killed by Joseon. This is a cycle of broken diplomacy and retaliatory violence.

Historical correction motif, the text repeatedly compares texts: Book of Wei, Book of Han, Tongdian, Yan Shigu, Chen Zan. Iryeon is not only preserving myth; it is also showing that the ancient historical text is fragmented and disputed.

The Fall of Wiman Joseon

Although Yang Bok escaped with his life, his expedition suffered a serious defeat. After losing much of his force, he fled into the mountains and narrowly avoided capture.

Meanwhile, the Left General Sunche attacked the western army of Joseon at the Paesu River. Despite repeated assaults, he was unable to break the Joseon defenses.

Seeing that neither of his commanders had succeeded in ending the campaign, the Son of Heaven dispatched an envoy named Wisan (Wei Shan) to persuade King Ugeo to surrender through the pressure of the advancing Han armies.

Ugeo eventually indicated his willingness to submit. As a gesture of surrender, he agreed to send the Crown Prince to the Han court together with tribute horses.

The Crown Prince departed with an escort of approximately 10,000 soldiers. However, as he approached the Paesu River, the envoy Wisan and the Left General became suspicious that such a large armed force might instead attempt an uprising. They therefore informed the Crown Prince:

"Since the Crown Prince has already surrendered, he cannot cross with weapons."

The Crown Prince, in turn, suspected that the Han envoy intended to deceive him and seize his forces. Rather than continue across the river, he withdrew with his army and returned to Joseon.

When Wisan reported these events to the Han court, the Son of Heaven held him responsible for the failure of the negotiations and ordered his execution.

The military campaign then resumed.

The Left General defeated the Joseon forces in the upper reaches of the Paesu River and continued advancing toward Wanggeom Fortress. Upon reaching the capital, he surrounded its northwestern side, while the Tower-Ship General established his camp to the south.

Despite being encircled, Ugeo defended Wanggeom Fortress with determination. Even after several months of siege, the Han armies were unable to force its surrender.

As the campaign dragged on without decisive success, the Son of Heaven appointed Gongsun Su, the former Governor of Jinan, to assume overall command of the expedition. He was granted full authority to conduct the campaign according to whatever measures he considered necessary.

Upon arriving in Joseon, Gongsun Su immediately arrested the Tower-Ship General and removed him from command. He then combined the remaining naval forces with those of the Left General and launched a renewed assault against Wanggeom Fortress.

During this period, several high-ranking ministers of Joseon secretly discussed surrendering to the Han.

Yan Shigu notes that Igye was the name of a place and clarifies that these were four separate individuals.

Although these ministers proposed surrender, King Ugeo refused to accept their recommendation.

Eventually Hando, Wanggyeop, and Noin fled to surrender to the Han forces. Noin, however, died before completing the journey.

In the summer of the third year of the Yuanfeng era (108 B.C.), Sam, Minister of Igye, arranged for the assassination of King Ugeo and subsequently surrendered to the Han.

Even after Ugeo's death, Wanggeom Fortress continued to resist. One of Ugeo's ministers, Seonggi, organized another uprising in an attempt to continue the defense.

To restore order, the Left General enlisted Ugeo's son Jang together with Choe, the son of Noin, to pacify the remaining population and eliminate Seonggi.

With Seonggi's defeat, the resistance finally came to an end, and Joseon was formally subdued.

The conquered territory was then divided into four Han commanderies:

Jinbeon
Imdun
Nakrang (Lelang)
Hyeondo (Xuantu)

Commentary on the Origins of the Three Kingdoms

The Samguk Sagi records in its main annals that Silla was founded first in the gapja year, followed later by the establishment of Goguryeo in the gapsin year.

The Four Yi and the Nine Yi

The Four Yi (Four Barbarians) consisted of:

Dongyi (Eastern Yi)
Seoyung (Western Rong)
Namman (Southern Man)
Bukjeok (Northern Di)

The Nine Yi were identified as:

Gyeoni, Eoi, Bangi, Hwangi, Baegi, Jeogi, Hyeoni, Pungi, Yangi

According to the Zhouli (Rites of Zhou), traditionally attributed to the Duke of Zhou, the official known as the Jikbangssi was responsible for administering the Four Yi and the Nine Maek. Here, the "Nine Maek" are understood to refer to the Eastern Yi.

References to Ancient States

"Myeongju, corresponding to the present-day Gangneung region, was formerly the state of Ye. A farmer plowing a field discovered the royal seal of the King of Ye and presented it to the authorities."

Likewise, Chunju (modern Chuncheon) is identified as ancient Usuju and is said to have belonged to the former state of Maek.

The commentary to the Huainanzi, written by Liu An, King of Huainan during the Former Han, similarly states:

"The Eastern Yi consist of nine groups."

The Analects provides another enumeration, identifying the nine peoples as:

1. Hyeondo
2. Nakrang (Lelang)
3. Goryeo (Goguryeo)
4. Mansik
5. Buyu
6. Saeksa
7. Dongdo
8. The Wa people
9. Cheonbi

The Haedong Anhonggi preserves yet another tradition, listing the Nine Han as:

1. Japan
2. Zhonghua (China)
3. Wu-Yue
4. Takra (Tamna)
5. Eungyu
6. Malgal (Mohe)
7. Dan-guk
8. Jurchen
9. Yemaek

Administrative Reorganization Under Han

The Book of Former Han records that in the gihae year (82 B.C.), the fifth year of the Shiyuan era under Emperor Zhao, two additional administrative bureaus were established.

The former Joseon territories of Pyeongna and Hyeondo Commandery were reorganized into the Pyeongju Governor-General's Office.

Likewise, the territories of Imdun and Nakrang (Lelang) were placed under the Eastern Commandant's Office.

Later Historical Traditions

The Tongdian records:

"The remaining people of Joseon were divided into more than seventy separate states, each measuring approximately one hundred ri on each side."

The Book of Later Han, compiled by Fan Ye during the Liu Song dynasty, provides additional information:

"During the Western Han, four commanderies were established in the former territory of Joseon, and later two administrative bureaus were added."

As Han administration gradually became more burdensome, the region was reorganized into seventy-eight countries, each containing approximately ten thousand households.

Mahan occupied the western region and consisted of fifty-four small states.
Jinhan occupied the eastern region and consisted of twelve small states.
Byeonhan occupied the southern region and likewise consisted of twelve small states.

Each of these settlements was recognized as an independent country within the broader confederation.

Notes:

Ninefold people motif, Nine Yi, Nine Han, Nine Maek. The number nine is repeatedly used to classify ancient peoples and border-worlds. Directional world map, east, west, south, north peoples: Dongyi, Seoyung, Namman, Bukjeok. This is an old cosmological geography, not just politics.

Layered identity motif, Mahan, Goguryeo, Jinhan, Silla, Baekje, Ye, Maek, Nakrang, Hyeondo, and others are not clean modern categories. The text preserves overlapping names and competing identifications. Lost seal / buried authority motif, the farmer finding the seal of the King of Ye while plowing is important: royal memory and ancient authority are literally buried in the land.

Administrative fragmentation motif, old Joseon becomes commanderies, outer bureaus, and dozens of smaller countries. This is the “ancient whole broken into imperial pieces” pattern.

Survivor-state motif, “remaining people of Joseon” divided into 70-plus states suggests continuity after collapse: the people survive, but in scattered political fragments.

Nakrang (Lelang) Commandery and Daebang

During the Former Han dynasty, Nakrang Commandery (Lelang Commandery) was first established.

Eung So (Ying Shao), a scholar who served during the Later Han under Yuan Shao, identified Nakrang as the territory of the former Joseon state.

The commentary to the New Book of Tang, a historical work compiled during the Song dynasty by Ouyang Xiu, Song Qi, and other scholars, likewise records:

"Pyeongyang Fortress was the former Nakrang Commandery of the Han."

The National History further records several references to Nakrang.

In the thirtieth year of King Hyeokgeose of Silla, people from Nakrang came to Silla and surrendered.

Later, during the fourth year of King Norye of Silla, corresponding to the reign of King Muhyul (Great King Daemusin) of Goguryeo, Nakrang was conquered and destroyed by Goguryeo. Following its collapse, many of the inhabitants of Nakrang, together with people from Daebang and North Daebang, sought refuge in Silla and surrendered.

The lands lying south of the Salsu River (identified here as the present-day Cheongcheon River) were incorporated into Han territory.

The location of Nakrang is further described as lying below Jungdusan Mountain along the frontier with the Malgal (Mohe) people.

Additional geographical evidence is attributed to King Onjo of Baekje, who stated:

"Nakrang lies to the east, and Malgal lies to the north."

Later Use of the Name Nakrang

During the Former Han period, a subordinate county of Nakrang Commandery was established in this region.

The people of Silla themselves also came to use the name Nakrang.

Because of this continuing tradition, the title "Lady of Nakrang Commandery" remained in use even during the Goryeo dynasty.

When Taejo of Goryeo married one of his daughters to Kim Bu, King Gyeongsun, the fifty-sixth and final ruler of Silla, she likewise received the title Princess Nakrang.

North Daebang

North Daebang was originally known as Jukdam Fortress.

The National History records that during the fourth year of King Norye of Silla (27 B.C.), the peoples of Daebang and Nakrang surrendered together to Silla.

South Daebang

During the period of Cao Wei, South Daebang Commandery was established.

The sea extending approximately one thousand ri south of Daebang was known as the Han Sea.

During the Jian'an era of the Later Han, the sparsely populated lands lying south of Mahan were reorganized into Daebang Commandery. From that time onward, both the Wa and the Han peoples became subordinate to the authority of Daebang.

Notes:

Fragmented-state motif, Mahan, Jinhan, and Byeonhan are described not as single unified states but as many small "countries." This continues the pattern of ancient Korea as a network of clustered polities.

Nakrang identity-layer motif, Nakrang is not simple. It is commandery, state, Pyeongyang, old Joseon memory, and later prestige title. The same name moves across history, geography, and royal identity.

Surrender/migration motif, Nakrang and Daebang people repeatedly "come to Silla and surrender," suggesting displaced populations moving into new political protection.

River-boundary uncertainty, Salsu is identified with Cheongcheon River by one tradition and Daedong River by another. Again, rivers act as political memory-lines, but the memory is contested.

Commandery-to-country motif, Daebang and Nakrang begin as Han administrative units, later become spoken of as "countries." This is a major transformation: imperial map names become local political identities.

Sea-zone motif, South Daebang introduces the Han Sea, linking Mahan, Wa, and Han through maritime space rather than only land borders.

Balhae and the Malgal

The Tongdian records that Balhae originally arose from the Sokmal Malgal (Sumo Mohe).

Its chieftain, Jo Yeong (Dae Joyeong), founded a new kingdom and named it Jindan. During the Xiantian era of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang, in the imja year, the kingdom abandoned the name Malgal and thereafter adopted the name Balhae.

In the gimi year (719 A.D.), corresponding to the seventh year of the Kaiyuan era, Jo Yeong died. He was posthumously honored with the title King Go (King Gao).

His crown prince succeeded to the throne, and Emperor Minghuang (Tang Xuanzong) formally recognized and invested him as king.

After receiving Tang recognition, the new ruler privately proclaimed the era name Inan (Ren'an), and the kingdom gradually developed into what later became known as the Prosperous State of the East (Haedong Seongguk).

Balhae eventually consisted of:

Five capitals
Fifteen prefectures
Sixty-two provinces (or administrative districts)

Later, during the early Tiancheng era, Balhae was invaded by the Khitan and subsequently came under Khitan rule.

Accounts Preserved in the History of the Three Kingdoms

The History of the Three Kingdoms records that in the muin year (678 A.D.), corresponding to the third year of the Yifeng era under Emperor Gaozong of Tang, the remaining people of Goguryeo gathered in the region south of northern Taebaeksan and established a new kingdom known as Balhae.

Around the twentieth year of the Kaiyuan era, Emperor Minghuang (Tang Xuanzong) dispatched a general to campaign against Balhae.

During the thirty-second year of King Seongdeok of Silla, corresponding to the gapsul year of Emperor Xuanzong, the combined forces of Balhae and the Malgal crossed the sea and invaded Dengzhou in Tang China. In response, Emperor Xuanzong launched a military expedition against them.

The Silla Tradition

The Silla records provide a similar account but identify the founder more explicitly.

According to these texts, the former Goguryeo general Jo Yeong, whose family name was Dae, gathered the surviving soldiers of Goguryeo, established a kingdom south of Taebaeksan, and named the new state Balhae.

He states that Balhae represented another branch of the Malgal peoples, the distinction between them being largely political rather than ethnic. At various times they acted as a single people, while at other times they existed as separate states.

He further notes that, according to the Jizhangdo, a geographical work attributed to Su Shi of the Song dynasty, Balhae was situated beyond the northeastern section of the Great Wall.

Geography of Balhae

The Text of Commanderies and States by Jia Dan records that the four prefectures of Balhae—Amnok, Namhae, Buyeo, and Chuseong—had formerly belonged to Goguryeo.

The geographical treatise further explains that Cheonjeong County, a subordinate county of Sakju (identified as present-day Yongju), lay thirty-nine relay stations from Chuseong Prefecture.

Balhae and the Malgal as Separate States

The History of the Three Kingdoms also preserves another tradition.

It states that during the final years of Baekje, Balhae, the Malgal, and Silla each occupied portions of former Baekje territory.

The Silla records likewise describe the geopolitical situation by stating:

"To the north are the Malgal, to the south are the Wa people, and to the west is Baekje. These are all harmful to the kingdom."

The same records further state that the territory of the Malgal extended as far as Aseullaju.

References in the Dongmyeonggi

The Dongmyeonggi records that the territory surrounding Jolbon Fortress bordered the lands of the Malgal, identified here with present-day Dongjin.

It further states that in the fourteenth year of King Jima of Silla, corresponding to the eulchuk year, Malgal forces invaded the northern frontier, attacked the fortress at Daeryeong, and crossed the Iha River.

The Malgal, Wuji, Suksin, and Okjeo

The Book of Later Wei records the Malgal under the name Mulgil (Wuji).

The Jizhangdo further identifies both the Eumnu (Yilou) and the Mulgil (Wuji) peoples as descendants of the ancient Suksin (Sushen).

According to Dongpo's Jizhangdo, both the northern and southern branches of Heuksu (Blackwater) were located north of Jinhan.

The historical texts further record that Emperor Dongmyeong conquered North Okjeo ten years after ascending the throne.

Additional records demonstrate that several regions known as Okjeo continued to exist independently.

In the forty-second year of King Onjo of Baekje, more than twenty households of South Okjeo surrendered to Baekje.

Likewise, in the fifty-second year of King Hyeokgeose of Silla, the National History records:

"East Okjeo came to Silla and presented fine horses."

Finally, according to the Jizhangdo, the territory of Heuksu (Blackwater) lay north of the Great Wall, while Okjeo was situated to its south.

Notes:

Remnant-kingdom motif, Balhae is framed as arising from the remaining people/soldiers of Goguryeo. This is the same post-collapse continuity pattern we saw with Joseon → Mahan.

Name-change / identity-shift motif, Sokmal Malgal → Jindan → Balhae. The people change names as political identity changes.

Split-and-merge people motif, Malgal and Balhae are repeatedly described as joining, separating, and being treated sometimes as one people and sometimes as two.

Northern frontier motif, Taebaeksan, Great Wall, Blackwater, Okjeo, Suksin, Mulgil, Malgal. This is the border-world of ancient Korea's northern memory.

Sea-crossing invasion motif, Balhae and Malgal cross the sea and attack Tang's Dengzhou. This is another ancient maritime-war movement pattern.

Goguryeo continuity motif, Balhae's key prefectures are explicitly identified as old Goguryeo lands, preserving territorial memory after Goguryeo's fall.

Border-pressure motif, Silla is surrounded by Malgal to the north, Wa to the south, and Baekje to the west. The text treats geography as constant pressure on the state.

Iseo-guk and the Five Gaya

The text records that in the fourteenth year of King Norye, the people of Iseo-guk attacked Geumseong, the capital of Silla.

Further evidence concerning Iseo-guk is preserved in the Text of Lands Donated to Various Temples, an ancient record traditionally maintained at Unmunsa Temple.

The document records:

"In the sixth year of the Zhenguan era, corresponding to the imjin year (631 A.D.), Yeongmisa Temple of Geumochon in Iseo County donated fields."

The Tradition of the Six Heavenly Eggs

The praise section of the Garakkukgi (Record of the Garak State) preserves the following tradition regarding the founding of Gaya.

It states that a single purple cord descended from heaven, carrying six perfectly round eggs.

Five of these eggs were taken to different settlements, while one remained within the fortress.

The egg that remained inside the fortress hatched into King Suro, the founder of Geumgwan Gaya.

The remaining five eggs each produced the rulers of the other Five Gaya states.

The Five Gaya in the Goryeo Period

The Saryak of Goryeo records that during the fifth year of the Tianfu era, corresponding to the gyeongja year (940 A.D.), King Taejo officially renamed the Five Gaya.

The Foundation of North Buyeo

The text then cites the Book of Former Han, which records the following account.

In the third year of the Shenjue era under Emperor Xuan, corresponding to the imsul year (58 B.C.), on the eighth day of the fourth month, the Heavenly Emperor descended to Heulseunggol Fortress, located on the frontier of Uiju in Great Liao.

According to the account, he descended riding a Five-Dragon Chariot.

After his arrival, he established his capital at that location, proclaimed himself king, and founded the kingdom of North Buyeo.

His name was Haemosu.

Haemosu later had a son named Buru and established Hae as the royal family surname.

The Founding of Goguryeo

King Hae Buru later transferred the capital to East Buyeo in accordance with the command of the Supreme Emperor (Heavenly Lord).

Afterward, Emperor Dongmyeong inherited the legacy of North Buyeo, established his capital at Jolbonju, and founded the kingdom known as Jolbon Buyeo.

Notes:

"The Heavenly Emperor descended riding a Five-Dragon Chariot."

That is a very different kind of image.

Five-Dragon Chariot, not merely "dragon," but a vehicle.

타고 내려왔다 descended riding, movement from above to below, with the being inside or upon the vehicle.

Heavenly Emperor, a sky-associated authority, not just a local ancestor.

흘승골성에 내려왔다 descended to Heulseunggol Fortress, a specific landing/place-of-arrival structure.

This belongs in the same symbolic family as the things I've been tracing: vimāna, divine chariots, sky-descents, dragon vehicles, heavenly kings, civilizing founders, and mythic technology hidden under religious language.

Ancient Korean sky-descent motif involving a divine ruler arriving by vehicle, described as a Five-Dragon Chariot. Possible mythic memory of advanced aerial craft, encoded through dragon imagery.

If translated literally, Oryonggeo can be understood as "a chariot of five dragons" or "a chariot pulled by five dragons." But rather than seeing this only as an imaginary dragon story, I wondered whether ancient people may have been describing, in their own language, some kind of heavenly machine or flying craft that they did not understand.

For example, if an object descending from the sky produced loud noise, vibration, and light, people of that time may have understood it as "dragons roaring while pulling a chariot down from heaven." Especially the phrase "five dragons," from my perspective, could also be imagined as five large sources of power or engines producing a great roar.

This gives a similar feeling to stories of vimanas or solar chariots in ancient Indian texts. It is very interesting that expressions such as beings descending from heaven, flying chariots, and divine vehicles appear repeatedly across many ancient civilizations.

Of course, I cannot state this as certain, and it may also be symbolic language. But the expression Five-Dragon Chariot in the Samguk Yusa makes me consider the possibility that ancient Korea also preserved a very old memory of beings descending from the sky and vehicles of the heavens.

The Founding of East Buyeo

Aranbul, a minister serving Hae Buru, King of North Buyeo, received a dream in which the Heavenly Emperor descended and spoke to him:

"Soon I intend to have my descendant establish a country here, so you must go elsewhere."

The Heavenly Emperor continued:

"In the eastern sea there is a place called Gaseopwon. The land is fertile and suitable for establishing a royal capital."

Aranbul reported the dream to King Hae Buru, who accepted the message and moved the capital to Gaseopwon. The kingdom thereafter became known as East Buyeo.

The Birth of Geumwa

Although Hae Buru had grown old, he still had no son to succeed him.

Desiring an heir, he performed rites to the mountains and rivers and prayed earnestly for a child to continue the royal lineage.

During one of these ceremonies, the horse he was riding arrived at a great pond identified as Cheonji on Baekdusan. There the horse stopped before a large stone and began shedding tears.

Finding this unusual, the king ordered the stone to be moved.

Beneath it they discovered a child whose appearance resembled a golden frog.

Filled with joy, the king declared:

"Surely Heaven has given me a son."

He adopted the child and named him Geumwa, meaning "Golden Frog."

When Geumwa reached adulthood, he was appointed Crown Prince. After Hae Buru's death, Geumwa ascended the throne as King of East Buyeo.

Later he passed the succession to his own Crown Prince, Daeso.

The Location of Jolbon Buyeo

He notes that some traditions place Jolbon in present-day Hwaju or Seongcheon, but dismisses these identifications as incorrect.

The Birth of Jumong

The Goryeo Annals of the National History record that the founding ancestor, Holy Emperor Dongmyeong, bore the surname Go and the personal name Jumong.

Before Jumong's birth, Hae Buru had already relocated the capital of North Buyeo to East Buyeo. After Hae Buru's death, Geumwa inherited the throne.

During Geumwa's reign he encountered a woman named Yuhwa beside the Ubal-su River, south of Taebaeksan.

Yuhwa introduced herself, saying:

"I am Yuhwa, daughter of Habaek, the River Lord. One day, while I was playing with my younger sisters, a man appeared before me and said that he was Haemosu, the son of the Heavenly Emperor. He brought me to a house beside the Amnok River beneath Ungsin Mountain. There he lay with me and afterward departed, never returning."

"Dangun had relations with the daughter of Habaek of Seoha, and she bore a son whom he named Buru."

He observes that the present account instead identifies Haemosu as the father of Jumong through Yuhwa.

Yuhwa continued her story:

"My parents rebuked me for marrying without a matchmaker and exiled me to this place."

The Miraculous Egg

Geumwa found Yuhwa's account unusual and confined her within a room.

Yet sunlight continually entered the room and shone upon her.

Whenever she moved away, the sunlight followed and illuminated her once more.

Soon afterward she became pregnant and laid a single egg approximately five doe in size.

Geumwa regarded the egg with suspicion.

He first threw it before dogs and pigs, but none would touch it.

He then discarded it along the roadside, yet the cattle and horses carefully avoided stepping upon it.

When it was abandoned in an open field, birds and wild animals gathered around it and sheltered it instead.

The king attempted to break the egg, but it could not be broken.

Eventually he returned it to Yuhwa.

She wrapped it in soft cloth and kept it in a warm place.

In time the shell opened, and a child emerged.

The text describes the child's appearance as extraordinary.

By the age of seven he possessed remarkable intelligence and unusual physical ability.

He fashioned his own bow and arrows, and every arrow he shot struck its mark.

According to the customs of the country, one skilled in archery was called "Jumong."

For this reason, the child received the name Jumong.

Jumong's Conflict with Daeso

Geumwa had seven sons who frequently played together with Jumong.

None of them, however, could equal his ability.

The eldest son, Daeso, warned King Geumwa:

"Jumong was not born from an ordinary human being. If we do not remove him now, he will surely bring trouble in the future."

The king ignored Daeso's warning.

Instead, he assigned Jumong the task of tending the royal horses.

Jumong understood horses exceptionally well.

He deliberately fed the finest horse sparingly until it appeared weak and thin, while feeding an inferior horse generously until it became healthy and strong.

The king chose the apparently stronger horse for himself and unknowingly gave the superior horse to Jumong.

Jumong's Escape

Eventually the king's sons and several ministers plotted to kill Jumong.

Learning of the conspiracy, Yuhwa warned her son:

"The people of this country seek your life. With your wisdom and ability, there is nowhere you could go and fail to survive. Leave this place at once."

Jumong fled together with three companions, including Oi.

When they reached the Eomsu River, whose precise location is no longer known, Jumong prayed:

"I am the son of the Heavenly Emperor and the grandson, through my mother, of Habaek. I flee from my enemies, who are close behind me. What should I do?"

Fish and turtles gathered together to form a bridge across the river.

Jumong and his companions crossed safely.

Immediately afterward, the creatures dispersed, preventing the pursuing cavalry from following.

The Foundation of Goguryeo

Jumong eventually arrived at Jolbonju, identified as the capital of Jolbon.

Since no royal palace yet existed, he constructed a simple thatched dwelling beside the Biryu River and established his new kingdom there.
He named the kingdom Goguryeo.

Although his original surname had been Hae, he now proclaimed himself the son of the Heavenly Emperor and one born through the power of sunlight.

For this reason he adopted the surname Go.

Jumong was twelve years old when, in the second year of the Jianshao era under Emperor Xiaoyuan of Han, corresponding to the gapsin year (38 B.C.), he ascended the throne as king.

At its height, Goguryeo is said to have contained 210,508 households.

An Alternative Tradition Preserved in the Jurimjeon

Volume 21 of the Jurimjeon, a Buddhist text compiled by Daoshi during the Tang dynasty, preserves another tradition concerning the birth of the future ruler.

According to this account, a female servant of King Yeongpumri became pregnant.

A physiognomist examined her and declared:

"She will one day become noble, and the child she bears will become king."

The king replied:

"The child is not mine. He must be killed."

The servant answered:

"A force descended from heaven, and because of that I became pregnant."

After the child was born, he was regarded as inauspicious and abandoned in a pigsty.

The pigs gathered around him and warmed him with their breath.

When he was later cast into a stable, the horses nourished him with milk, allowing him to survive.

The child eventually grew to adulthood and became King of Buyeo.

He further states that Jolbon Buyeo was another name for North Buyeo and finally observes that Emperor Dongmyeong was also known by the name King Buru.

Notes:

This section adds more of the mythic pattern: non-human birth, sunlight conception, egg birth, animal protection, river-crossing by creatures, and heavenly lineage.

1. Heavenly conception
Korean line:

“기운이 하늘로부터 내려와서 제가 임신한 것입니다.”
“A force descended from heaven, and because of that I became pregnant.”

That naturally echoes:
divine/heavenly power → woman → miraculous child → future king/savior/founder.

In Samguk Yusa, that becomes Yuhwa → sunlight/heavenly force → egg → Jumong.
In Christianity, it becomes Mary → Holy Spirit → Jesus.

Not identical, but structurally close.

2. The threatened miraculous child
Jumong is not accepted as normal. They try to destroy the egg. Animals refuse to harm it. Later rivals fear him and try to kill him.

That echoes a wider ancient pattern:
unusual birth → ruler fears child → attempted killing/exposure → child survives → child fulfills destiny.

That is seen in many ancient traditions, including Moses, Sargon, Romulus and Remus, Krishna, and others.

3. Water crossing / divine escape
Jumong says:

"나는 천제의 아들이며 하백의 외손자다..."
"I am the son of the Heavenly Emperor and the grandson of Habaek..."

Then fish and turtles create a bridge, and after he crosses, they scatter so the pursuers cannot follow.

That is very close in symbolic function to Moses crossing the sea:
chosen figure pursued → impossible water barrier → divine/natural intervention → chosen group crosses → pursuers are stopped.

Not the same mechanism, but the same mythic grammar.

Christianity may not have invented many of these structures; it inherited, reworked, and theologized older mythic patterns already present across ancient cultures.

The even stronger research framing is:
These stories may preserve fragments of a much older symbolic memory: sky-beings, miraculous births, divine vehicles, chosen bloodlines, animal guardians, river crossings, and founders who arrive through abnormal means.

Byeonhan and the Origins of Silla

In the imo year, the nineteenth year after King Hyeokgeose, founder of Silla, ascended the throne, the people of Byeonhan submitted their country and surrendered.

The New Book of Tang and the Old Book of Tang both state:

"The descendants of Byeonhan lived in the land of Nakrang (Lelang)."

The Book of Later Han likewise records the geographical relationship of the Three Han:

Byeonhan occupied the south.
Mahan occupied the west.
Jinhan occupied the east.

Choe Chiwon further identified Byeonhan with Baekje.

According to the Baekje Annals, King Onjo founded Baekje in the fourth year of the Hongjia era, corresponding to the gapjin year (17 B.C.).

He further explains that the Book of Tang describes the descendants of Byeonhan as dwelling in Nakrang because King Onjo's royal lineage ultimately descended from King Dongmyeong.

The Qin Refugees and the Formation of Jinhan

The Book of Later Han preserves another tradition concerning the origin of Jinhan.

According to an elder of Jinhan, refugees fleeing the Qin state migrated into Hanguk, the land of the Samhan.

Mahan granted these refugees territory in the eastern region.

There they gathered together, established communities, and, because their language resembled that of Qin, they became known as Qinhan.

Jinhan consisted of twelve small states, each containing approximately ten thousand households, with every settlement recognized as an independent country.

The Prosperity of the Silla Capital

At the height of the Silla kingdom, the capital is said to have contained:

178,736 households
1,360 administrative wards
55 villages (ri)
35 geumiptaek (wealthy aristocratic estates)

The estates included Namtaek, Buktaek, Ubiso-taek, Bonpi-taek, Yangtaek, Jisang-taek, Jaemaejeong-taek (the ancestral residence of Kim Yusin), Bugyu-taek, Namyu-taek, Dae-taek, Binji-taek, Jangsa-taek, Sangaeng-taek, Haaeng-taek, Sumang-taek, Cheon-taek, Yangsang-taek, Hangi-taek, Bihyeol-taek, Panjeok-taek, Byeolgyo-taek, Anam-taek, Geumyangjong-taek, Goksu-taek, Yuya-taek, Saha-taek, Saryang-taek, Jeongsang-taek, Inam-taek (also called Uso-taek), Sanaegok-taek, Ji-taek, Sasang-taek (also called Daesuk-taek), Imsang-taek, Gyonam-taek, Hangjil-taek, Nusang-taek, Isang-taek, Myeongnam-taek, Jeongha-taek, and many others.

During the reign of King Heongang, the forty-ninth ruler of Silla, the capital was said to contain no thatched houses.

The eaves of neighboring buildings touched one another, while the sounds of singing and flute music filled the streets continuously throughout both day and night.

The Six Villages of Jinhan

The land of Jinhan originally consisted of six villages.

1. Alcheon Yangsan Village

The first village was Alcheon Yangsan.

South of the village stood the present-day Dameomsa Temple.

Its village chief was Alpyeong, who is said to have first descended from heaven upon Pyoam Peak.

During the ninth year of King Yuri (King Norye), the district became known as Geumnyang-bu.

Later, in the fifth year of the Tianfu era under Taejo of Goryeo (940 A.D.), it was renamed Jungheung-bu.

The districts of Pajam, Dongsan, Pisang, and Dongchon belonged to this administrative region.

2. Dolsan Goheo Village

The second village was Dolsan Goheo.

Its chief was Sobeoldori, who descended from Hyeongsan Mountain.

He became the ancestor of the Jeong clan of Saryang-bu.

The district later became known as Namsan-bu, incorporating villages such as Guryangbeol, Madeungo, Dobuk, and Hoedeok.

3. Musan Daesusan

The third village was Musan Daesusan.

Its chief was Guryema, whose name is sometimes written simply as Gu.

He descended from Isan Mountain, also called Gaebisan.

The district later became Jangbok-bu, to which western settlements such as Bakgokchon belonged.

4. Jasan Jinji Village

The fourth village was Jasan Jinji, whose name is also written Binji, Binja, or Bingji.

Its chief was Jibaekho, who descended from Hwasan Mountain.

He became the ancestor of the Choe clan of Bonpi-bu.

The district later became Tongseon-bu, including southeastern villages such as Sipa.

He further remarks that ruins located south of present-day Hwangnyongsa Temple and Mitansa Temple are believed to mark Choe Chiwon's ancestral home.

5. Geumsan Gari Village

The fifth village was Geumsan Gari, identified with present-day Geumgangsan north of Gyeongju and the mountain north of Baengnyulsa Temple.

Its chief was Gita, also written Jita.

He descended from Myeonghwasan Mountain and became the ancestor of Hangi-bu.

The district later became Gadeok-bu and included eastern villages such as Sangseoji, Haseoji, and Naea.

6. Myeonghwasan Goya Village

The sixth village was Myeonghwasan Goya.

Its chief was Hojin, who descended from Geumgangsan Mountain north of Gyeongju.

He became the ancestor of the Seol clan of Seupbi-bu.

The district later became Imcheon-bu and included northeastern settlements such as Muri Village, Ingumi Village, and Gwol-gok (also called Gal-gok).

The Heavenly Ancestors of the Six Villages

During the ninth year of King Yuri (32 A.D.), the six districts were formally renamed, and each received its own hereditary surname.

The Birth of King Hyeokgeose

The first year of the Dijie era under Emperor Xuan of the Former Han, corresponding to the imja year (69 B.C.), the leaders of the six villages assembled with their followers upon the southern hill of Alcheon.

The village chiefs gathered together and deliberated:

"Until now we have governed the people without serving a king above us. Because of this, the people have become unruly and each acts according to his own will. Would it not be better to seek a virtuous man, establish him as king, found a country, and fix a permanent capital?"

Afterward they climbed to a high place and looked toward the south.

Near Najeong Well, below Yangsan Mountain, they witnessed a strange energy resembling lightning descending to the earth.

There they saw a white horse kneeling as though offering reverence.

When they approached, they discovered a single large egg.

As the people drew near, the horse cried out loudly before ascending into heaven.

When they broke open the egg, they found a baby boy of remarkable dignity and beauty.

Filled with wonder, they bathed the child at Dongcheon, which is north of Dongcheonsa Temple in Sanoeya.

As the child was bathed, light radiated from his body.

Birds and wild animals gathered around him in celebration.

Heaven and earth trembled, and the sun and moon became clear and bright.

The child was therefore named Hyeokgeose.

He was also known as King Bulgunae, meaning "He who rules the world with bright light."

The commentators further explain:

"This refers to the praise offered to Seosul Seongmo, declaring that she gave birth to the wise ruler who founded the kingdom."

The Birth of Queen Alyeong

King Hyeokgeose received the royal title Geoseulhan, also written Geoseogan.

According to the tradition, this title originated because his first words after opening his mouth were:

"Alji Geoseogan has arisen once."

From that time onward, Geoseogan became an honorific title used for the rulers of Silla.

The people rejoiced together, saying:

"Now that the Son of Heaven has descended from heaven, it is only fitting that we find a worthy queen to become his consort."

That same day, beside Alyeong Well in Saryang-ri, also known as Ariyeong Well, a gyeryong (chicken-dragon) appeared.

From its left side it gave birth to a baby girl.

The dragon soon died.

When its body was opened, the infant was found inside.

The child possessed extraordinary beauty, although her lips resembled the beak of a chicken.

When she was bathed in the North Stream of Wolseong, the beak disappeared.

For this reason, the stream thereafter became known as Balcheon.

Notes:

This spread is loaded with the pattern again: heavenly descent, lightning-like energy, a sky horse, a red/blue egg, luminous body, trembling heaven and earth, animal response, and a dragon-birth queen.

I am beginning to consider whether some of the "egg" motifs in the Samguk Yusa may preserve a memory of enclosed capsule-like craft or orb-like descent phenomena. To ancient observers, a smooth, rounded vessel descending from the sky, glowing red or blue, producing light or vibration, and later opening to reveal a being, could naturally be described as an "egg." In this reading, the egg is not only a symbol of birth, but possibly a cultural translation of an unknown technological object.

The "white horse" may not be an animal in the literal sense, but a sky vehicle or carrier craft described through the symbolic language available to ancient observers. Its "cry" may represent the loud sound of propulsion, like the roar later understood as dragons. After depositing the egg-like capsule, the craft ascends again into the sky, leaving behind the being who becomes the founder.

That makes the horse functionally similar to the Five-Dragon Chariot.

The Horse and Egg Motif in the Birth of Hyeokgeose

Source Context

In the Samguk Yusa account of Silla's foundation, the six village chiefs gather near Alcheon to seek a virtuous ruler. Looking south toward Yangsan, they see a strange energy like lightning descending near Najeong Well. At the site, they find a white horse kneeling as if bowing. Beside it is a red egg, or according to another version, a large blue egg. When the people approach, the horse cries out loudly and ascends into heaven. The egg is then opened, and a male child is found inside. This child becomes King Hyeokgeose, the founder of Silla.

Key Motif Sequence

1. A group of leaders seeks a ruler.
2. A strange lightning-like energy appears on the ground.
3. A white horse is found kneeling at the site.
4. A red or blue egg is discovered.
5. The horse cries out loudly.
6. The horse ascends into heaven.

7. The egg is opened.
8. A luminous or extraordinary child emerges.
9. The child becomes the founder-king.

Working Hypothesis

The "horse" in this passage may not only represent a sacred animal. It may preserve a symbolic memory of a sky-borne carrier or craft that descended, deposited an egg-like capsule, and then ascended again. The "cry" of the horse may represent the loud sound of propulsion, similar to how dragon roars in other ancient traditions may describe the sound of engines or powerful aerial movement.

The egg, especially because it is described as red or blue and appears in connection with lightning-like energy, may be interpreted as more than a biological or mythic egg. It could represent an enclosed capsule, orb, or vessel containing the being who later becomes the founder of Silla.

Comparative Interpretation

This motif resembles other ancient traditions in which divine or semi-divine beings arrive from the sky through vehicles, chariots, animals, or radiant objects. In Indian traditions, vimanas and solar chariots serve as aerial vehicles of gods or royal beings. In other traditions, dragons, horses, birds, or shining orbs may function as symbolic descriptions of technologies that ancient observers did not possess the vocabulary to explain.

In this reading:

The white horse may represent the carrier craft.
The horse's cry may represent propulsion noise.
The ascent into heaven may represent the craft departing.
The red or blue egg may represent a capsule or orb-like vessel.
The child inside the egg may represent a being delivered from the sky.
The lightning-like energy may represent atmospheric disturbance, light, power, or descent energy.

The horse and egg motif should therefore be flagged as a possible "carrier craft and capsule" pattern within the Samguk Yusa.

The Dragon and the Baby Girl

This legend "Say that a dragon appeared and died, and when its belly was cut open, a baby girl was found. Her form and face were exceptionally beautiful, but her lips were like the beak of a chicken. When they bathed her in the North Stream of Wolseong, the beak fell off. Because of this, that stream was called Balcheon."

Perhaps this indicates an aerial craft that landed and the hatch was opened and the child was pulled from the vehicle, the beak could have actually been the oxygen apparatus that later was removed by the locals. If Iryeon merely wanted to describe a strange-looking child, the beak could have remained a part of her appearance. Instead, the feature is removed.

The Enthronement of Hyeokgeose and Alyeong

After the two children were discovered, a royal palace was constructed at the foot of the mountain west of Namsan, identified as the site of present-day Changnimsa Temple. There the boy and the girl were raised with great reverence.

The boy had emerged from an egg whose shape resembled a gourd.

Because the local people referred to a gourd-dipper as bak, they adopted Bak (Park) as his family name.

The girl received the name Alyeong after the well from which she had been born.

In the gapja year, corresponding to the first year of the Wufeng (Obong) era (57 B.C.), the two sacred children reached the age of thirteen.

The boy ascended the throne as king, and the girl became his queen.

The newly established kingdom was called Seorabeol, also written Seobeol.

The kingdom was also known by the names Sara and Saro.

Because the king had been born near Gyejeong (the Chicken Well), the country was at first called Gyerim-guk, the "Chicken-Forest State."

This name commemorated the auspicious appearance of the gyeryong (chicken-dragon).

Traditions Concerning the Name Gyerim

According to this account, during the reign of King Talhae, Kim Alji was discovered after a rooster crowed within the forest.

Because of this miraculous event, the kingdom's name was changed to Gyerim.

In later generations, the name of the kingdom became fixed as Silla.

The Death of King Hyeokgeose

King Bak Hyeokgeose ruled for sixty-one years before ascending into heaven.

Seven days later, only his body descended back to the earth, scattered into separate parts.

It is likewise recorded that Queen Alyeong died at approximately the same time.

The people attempted to gather the king's remains together for burial.

A great serpent, however, prevented them from doing so.

Unable to reunite the body, they buried the head and each of the four limbs separately, creating what became known as the Five Tombs.

These burial sites were also called the Sareung, or Serpent Tombs.

The tombs may be located north of present-day Dameomsa Temple as these very burial sites.

After Hyeokgeose's death, the Crown Prince Namhae succeeded to the throne.

King Namhae

King Namhae Geoseogan was also known by the title Chachaung.

His father was King Hyeokgeose, and his mother was Queen Alyeong.

His consort was Lady Unje, whose name is also written Untae.

According to the chronology preserved in the text, King Namhae ascended the throne during the fourth year of the Yuanshi era under Emperor Ping of the Former Han on a gapja day.

He ruled for twenty-one years before dying during the fourth year of the Dihuang era on a gapsin day.

Royal Titles in Early Silla

The title Geoseogan was the Jinhan word for "king."

It served as an honorific title bestowed upon noble rulers.

Some traditions further state that Chachaung was also pronounced Jachung.

The Silla scholar Kim Daemun, author of works including the Goseungjeon and the Hwarang Segi, offers the following explanation:

"Chachaung is a dialect word meaning shaman. Because people believed that shamans served the spirits and presided over sacred rites, they feared and respected them. Therefore, one who became a revered elder was called Jachung."

Another royal title used during this period was Isageum.

The Succession of Talhae

After King Namhae died, his son Norye initially offered the throne to Talhae.

Talhae replied:

"I have heard that a truly holy and wise man possesses many teeth."

The two men therefore tested one another by biting into rice cakes.

According to the tradition preserved in the text, this unusual examination had been handed down from ancient times as a method of determining the rightful king.

Notes:

Hyeokgeose ascends into heaven, his body falls after seven days, a great serpent prevents ordinary burial, and the royal title Chachaung is linked to shamanic authority. This keeps the founder line tied to sky-ascent, serpent guardianship, ritual power, and sacred kingship.

Hyeokgeose ascended in a sky vehicle. Seven days later, the vehicle or body returned violently, perhaps crashing. His remains were scattered or badly damaged. The people could not recover or assemble the full body because a "great serpent" blocked them. This serpent may have been a mythic description of tangled wreckage, coiled structural debris, tubing, cables, burned material, or a dangerous twisted remnant of the craft.

Hyeokgeose's ascent to heaven followed by the scattered fall of his body seven days later may preserve a mythologized account of a failed return or crash. The "great serpent" that prevented the people from gathering the body may symbolize a dangerous tangled wreckage or coiled debris field surrounding the remains. The creation of the Five Tombs from separately buried body parts may indicate that only partial remains could be recovered.

The Arrival of Talhae

When the mysterious boat first appeared, King Suro saw it and, together with his ministers and the people of the kingdom, beat drums in welcome and attempted to persuade it to come ashore.

Instead, the vessel quickly departed and sailed eastward, eventually arriving at Ajinpo Harbor in Hajiji Village, east of Gyerim.

Ajin Uiseon and the Mysterious Boat

At that time an elderly woman named Ajin Uiseon happened to be fishing along the seashore.

When she saw the strange vessel offshore, she remarked:

"There has never before been a rock in the middle of this sea. Why, then, have so many magpies gathered there?"

The people brought the boat ashore and discovered that the birds had gathered upon a large chest resting inside it.

The chest measured twenty ja in length and thirteen ja in width.

After dragging the boat onto land, they secured it beneath nearby trees.

Because they could not determine whether what they had found was auspicious or inauspicious, they first reported the matter to Heaven.

Some time later they opened the chest.

Inside they found a handsome and dignified young boy.

The chest also contained seven kinds of treasures together with several attendants.

The boy and his companions were treated with honor for seven days.

At the end of that time, the boy spoke.

Talhae's Account of His Origin

The boy declared:

"I come from Yongseong-guk, the Dragon-Castle Country. It is also known as Jeongmyeong-guk or Wanha-guk. Wanha is likewise called Hwaha-guk. Yongseong lies one thousand ri northeast of Wa (Japan).

Formerly our country was ruled by twenty-eight Dragon Kings. Although they bore this title, each was born from a human mother. From the age of five or six they ascended the throne, instructed the people, and governed according to proper human nature and destiny.

Our kingdom possessed eight ranks of seonggol (sacred-bone lineage), and all rulers were chosen from these noble lineages.

My royal father, Hamdalpha, took as his queen a princess from Jeongnyeo-guk.

For many years they had no son. They prayed continually for an heir, and after seven years the queen gave birth to an egg.

My father assembled his ministers and said:

Throughout ancient and modern times there has never been a case of a person giving birth to an egg. Perhaps this is an ill omen."

The ministers therefore placed me inside a chest. They loaded it with seven kinds of treasures together with attendants and set it adrift upon the sea.

As they released the vessel they prayed:

May you reach the land with which you share a destined connection. There establish a kingdom and found your household.'

Then a great red dragon suddenly appeared and escorted the boat until it reached this place."

Talhae Searches for a Home

After telling his story, the boy took a staff, accompanied by two attendants, and climbed Tohamsan Mountain.

There he constructed a small stone dwelling.

For seven days he remained on the mountain, observing the surrounding region to determine whether there was a suitable place to establish his residence.

Eventually he saw a mountain whose shape resembled a crescent moon.

Judging the terrain favorable for long-term settlement, he descended from the mountain and made his way there.

The property belonged to a man named Hogong.

The Dispute with Hogong

Talhae devised a plan to claim the property.

Secretly, he buried a whetstone together with charcoal in the ground beside the house.

Early the following morning he stood before Hogong's gate and declared:

"This is the house where my ancestors have lived for generations."

Hogong denied the claim, insisting that the property had always belonged to him.

Unable to settle the dispute between themselves, the two men brought the matter before the government officials.

The officials asked Talhae:

"What evidence do you have that this house belongs to you?"

Talhae replied:

"My ancestors were blacksmiths. While I was away for a short time in a neighboring village, someone else occupied the house. Dig beneath the ground, and you will discover the proof."

The officials excavated the site.

Exactly as Talhae had claimed, they uncovered both a whetstone and pieces of charcoal.

Accepting this as evidence, the authorities awarded the house to Talhae, who thereafter established his residence there.

Talhae's Marriage

King Namhae recognized Talhae's wisdom and ability.

He therefore gave Talhae his eldest daughter in marriage.

Her name was Lady Ani.

Notes:

We have egg birth, box/capsule, boat/vessel, seven treasures, servants, red dragon escort, arrival from a far eastern Dragon-Castle country, and a child who later proves royal intelligence. The “egg placed into a box and sent by sea” looks like a second version of the capsule-being motif, but this time with a dragon-escorted sea vessel instead of a horse/sky descent.

Talhae and the Well of Dongak

One day Talhae ascended Dongak (the Eastern Peak).

As he returned from the mountain, he instructed one of his servants to fetch water.

The servant filled the cup, but drank from it before bringing it back to his master.

When he attempted to offer the cup to Talhae, it became firmly attached to his mouth and could not be removed.

Talhae rebuked him.

The frightened servant swore an oath:

"From this day forward, whether the journey is near or far, I will never again drink before my lord."

Only after making this vow did the cup fall away from his mouth.

Thereafter the servant greatly feared Talhae and never again dared deceive him.

The Reign of King Talhae

After the death of King Norye, Talhae ascended the throne in the sixth month of the jeongsa year (57 A.D.), corresponding to the second year of the Zhongyuan era under Emperor Guangwu of the Later Han.

One tradition states that because he had once obtained another man's house by falsely claiming ancestral ownership, his family name became Seok.

Another explanation derives the name from the chest in which he had arrived.

Because magpies (jak) had gathered upon the chest, the bird component of the Chinese character for "magpie" was removed, leaving the character Seok.

Another tradition explains that because Talhae broke out of the egg contained within the chest, he received the name Talhae, meaning "to break out."

After ruling for twenty-three years, Talhae died in the gimyo year (79 A.D.), corresponding to the fourth year of the Jianchu era.

He was buried upon Socheon-gu Hill.

The Bones of Talhae

Following his burial, the people received a divine command:

"Carefully recover my bones."

When the tomb was reopened, they discovered that Talhae's remains were of extraordinary size.

According to the text:

His skull measured three ja and two chi in circumference.
His body measured nine ja and seven chi in length.
His teeth were fused together into a single mass.
Every joint and bone appeared firmly connected.

The bones were then broken apart, mixed with clay, and fashioned into an image, which was enshrined within the royal palace.

Afterward another divine message was received:

"Enshrine my bones upon Dongak, the Eastern Peak."

The image was therefore moved to Dongak, where Talhae came to be worshipped.

Another Tradition Concerning Talhae's Enshrinement

According to this tradition, Talhae remained buried until the reign of King Munmu, the twenty-seventh ruler of Silla.

In the gyeongsin year, corresponding to the second year of the Diaolu era, on the night of the sinyu day, the fifteenth day of the third month, an elderly man of fierce appearance appeared in the king's dream.
The figure declared:

"I am Talhae. Dig up my bones from Socheon-gu, fashion an image from them, and enshrine it upon Tohamsan Mountain."

The king obeyed these instructions.

From that time onward the state continued to perform official rites in Talhae's honor.

For this reason he came to be revered as the God of Dongak (the Eastern Peak).

The Birth of Kim Alji

In the gyeongjin year (60 A.D.), the text records another miraculous event.

It dates the occurrence to the fourth day of the eighth month during the third year of the Yongping era under Emperor Ming of the Later Han.

At that time Hogong was traveling at night through Seori, west of Wolseong.

There he observed an extraordinary light shining from within Sirim, also called Gurim.

A purple cloud extended from heaven to the earth.

Within the cloud hung a golden chest suspended from the branch of a tree.

Brilliant light radiated from the chest.

Beneath the tree a white rooster crowed continuously.

When Hogong reported the event, the king personally visited the forest and opened the chest.

Inside lay a baby boy.

The child immediately stood up.

Because the event closely resembled the earlier birth of Hyeokgeose, the child received the name Alji.

When the king carried the child back to the palace, birds and wild animals followed behind, leaping and dancing.

The Origin of the Kim Clan

On an auspicious day the king appointed Alji as Crown Prince.

Alji, however, later yielded his position to King Pasa and never himself ascended the throne.

Because he had emerged from a golden chest, he was given the family name Kim, meaning "gold."

The genealogy of his descendants as follows:

Alji fathered Yeolhan.
Yeolhan fathered Ado.
Ado fathered Suryu.
Suryu fathered Ukbu.
Ukbu fathered Gudo (also written Gudo).
Gudo fathered Michu.

When King Michu ascended the throne, the royal Kim lineage of Silla formally began from Alji.

Notes:

Talhae has a strange post-death body: giant bones, fused teeth, bones remade into an image, then enshrined as a mountain deity. Kim Alji repeats the arrival pattern: night vision, great light, purple cloud descending from heaven to earth, golden box/chest, light emitted from the object, white rooster signal, child inside, animal celebration. This is another strong capsule/object descent motif.

Yeonorang and Seonyeo

In the jeongyu year (158 A.D.), the fourth year after the eighth ruler of Silla, King Adalla, ascended the throne, a married couple named Yeonorang and Seonyeo lived along the shore of the East Sea.

One day Yeonorang went to the seashore to gather seaweed.

Suddenly a great rock—although some traditions state that it was a fish—lifted him and carried him across the sea to Japan.

The people of Japan saw him and declared:

"This man is no ordinary person."

They therefore made Yeonorang their king.

Seonyeo's Journey

When her husband failed to return, Seonyeo became concerned and went to the seashore in search of him.

There she discovered only his shoes lying upon the shore.

As she stepped onto the same rock, it likewise carried her across the sea to Japan.

The people of Japan were astonished by her arrival and presented her before Yeonorang.

Thus the husband and wife were reunited, and Seonyeo became a noble consort.

The Return of the Sun and Moon

At that same time, the kingdom of Silla experienced a mysterious darkness.

The sun and moon lost their brightness.

The royal astronomer reported to King Adalla:

"The vital essence of the sun and moon formerly resided within our country. Now it has departed for Japan. That is why this strange calamity has occurred."

The king therefore dispatched an envoy to Japan requesting that Yeonorang and Seonyeo return to Silla.

Yeonorang replied:

"My coming to this country was the will of Heaven. How, then, could I now return? However, my consort has woven a piece of fine silk. Take it back with you, offer sacrifice to Heaven using this cloth, and that will be sufficient."

Yeonorang entrusted the silk to the envoy.

After returning to Silla, the envoy reported everything to the king.

The king performed the prescribed sacrifice according to Yeonorang's instructions.

Immediately afterward, the sun and moon regained their former brightness.

The woven silk was thereafter preserved as a national treasure and stored within the royal treasury.

The treasury became known as Gwibi-go, the "Storehouse of the Noble Consort."

The place where the sacrifice to Heaven was performed came to be called Yeongil-hyeon ("Welcoming the Sun County"), also known as Dogiya.

King Michu

The thirteenth ruler of Silla, King Michu Isageum, was also known by the names Mijo and Migo.

He was the seventh-generation descendant of Kim Alji.

For generations his family occupied the highest government offices, his reputation became widely known throughout the land, and the text praises him as possessing exceptional virtue.

After the death of King Cheomhae, Michu inherited the throne and became king.

This title was given because Michu became the first member of the Kim clan to ascend the throne of Silla.

For this reason, the later Kim kings properly regarded him as the founding ancestor of their royal house.

King Michu died twenty-three years after ascending the throne.

His tomb is located east of Heungnyunsa Temple.

A Later Record

During the reign of the fourteenth ruler, King Yurye, the people of Iseo-guk attacked Geumseong, the capital of Silla.

It further records that envoys were sent to Wa (Japan), but the king of Wa detained them and did not permit their return for thirty years.

Notes:

This spread gives us a powerful solar/lunar displacement motif. Yeonorang and Seonyeo are carried away by a strange sea-object, rock or fish, and afterward the sun and moon lose their light in Silla. Their essence is said to have gone to Japan. The restoration happens through a sacred woven silk and a sacrifice to Heaven. So the key pattern is: unusual transport → human relocation → cosmic light imbalance → ritual object → restoration of sun and moon.

King Nulji and the Captivity of His Brothers

In the gimi year (419 A.D.), the third year after King Nulji ascended the throne, King Jangsu of Goguryeo dispatched an envoy to Silla with the following request:

"Our king has heard that Your Majesty's younger brother, Bohae, is renowned for his wisdom and ability. Wishing to establish close friendship with him, he has sent this humble servant to request that he visit Goguryeo."

King Nulji regarded the proposal as a fortunate opportunity to strengthen relations between the two kingdoms.

Trusting Goguryeo's intentions, he sent his younger brother Bohae as an honored guest, accompanied by the Inner Minister Kim Mual.

After Bohae arrived, however, King Jangsu refused to permit either man to return to Silla.

The King's Lament

Several years later, in the eulchuk year (425 A.D.), the tenth year of King Nulji's reign, the king gathered his ministers, military commanders, and leading officials for a great banquet.

After three rounds of wine had been served and music began to play, the king was overcome with emotion.

With tears in his eyes he addressed those assembled:

"Long ago, because my father sincerely cared for the welfare of the people, he sent my beloved brother to Wa. He died without ever seeing him again.

"After I ascended the throne, neighboring kingdoms continually threatened us with war. Only Goguryeo spoke of friendship, and trusting those words I sent my younger brother there. Yet Goguryeo has also detained him and refuses to let him return.

"Although I possess royal honor and wealth, there has not been a single day that I have not thought of my brothers.

"If only I could once more stand together with both of them before the ancestral shrine of our father, I could finally repay the loyalty of our people.

"Who among you can accomplish such a task?"

The ministers answered:

"This undertaking can be accomplished only by one possessing both wisdom and courage.

"Among all the men of our kingdom, Jesang, governor of Sapra-gun (identified as present-day Yangsan in Gyeongsang Province), alone possesses such ability."

Jesang Accepts the Mission

The king summoned Jesang and entrusted him with the mission.

Jesang bowed twice before replying:

"I have heard it said:

'When the ruler is anxious, the minister must bear disgrace.

When the ruler suffers disgrace, the minister must be prepared to die.'

"It is also said:

'If a minister first considers whether a task is easy or difficult, he cannot be called loyal.

If he first weighs life against death, he cannot be called brave.'

"Though I am unworthy, I accept Your Majesty's command."

The king was deeply moved by these words.

He shared wine with Jesang, grasped his hand, and personally bid him farewell.

The Rescue of Bohae

Jesang immediately departed for Goguryeo in disguise.

After secretly contacting Bohae, the two arranged a plan for escape.

Jesang first returned alone to the mouth of the Goseong River, where he waited until the fifteenth day of the fifth month.

As the appointed day approached, Bohae feigned illness and remained absent from court for several days.

Then, under cover of darkness, he escaped and reached the shore near Goseong.

When King Jangsu discovered the escape, he dispatched several dozen horsemen in pursuit.

Bohae was nearly captured.

Yet during his years in Goguryeo he had always treated those around him with generosity.

Remembering his kindness, the pursuing soldiers removed the iron heads from their arrows before shooting.

Thus they fulfilled their orders while ensuring Bohae would not be killed.

Bohae escaped safely and finally returned to Silla.

The King's Joy and Sorrow

When King Nulji embraced his brother once more, his happiness was mixed with grief.

Holding back his tears, he said:

"It is as though my body has recovered one arm while the other still remains missing.

Or as though one eye has been restored while the other has been lost.

Though I rejoice in recovering one brother, the other still remains in captivity."

When Jesang heard these words, he silently bowed twice before the king.

Without returning home or even mounting a horse, he immediately departed upon a second mission.

Jesang's Journey to Wa

Jesang traveled directly to the seashore at Yulpo.

When his wife learned of his departure, she hurried after him.

By the time she reached the shore, however, Jesang's ship had already departed.

She cried out desperately to him from the shore.

Jesang answered only by raising his hand in farewell.

Upon arriving in Wa (Japan), Jesang presented himself before the king and declared:

"The king of Gyerim unjustly executed my father. Therefore I have fled here seeking refuge."

Believing the story, the king of Wa welcomed Jesang, granted him a residence, and treated him generously.

Jesang remained constantly beside Prince Mihae.

Together they hunted birds and caught fish, which they regularly presented to the king of Wa.

Because of Jesang's faithful service, no suspicion ever arose.

The Escape of Mihae

One morning a heavy fog settled over the land.

Jesang quietly said to Mihae:

"Now is the time. You must escape."

Mihae answered:

"Then let us flee together."

Jesang replied:

"If I also disappear, the people of Wa will immediately pursue us. I must remain behind and delay them."

Mihae protested:

"I now regard you as a father and elder brother. How could I abandon you and return alone?"

Jesang answered:

"If your life is saved, the heart of our great king will finally find peace. I have no hope of saving my own."

Jesang then poured wine and urged Mihae to drink before departing.

A man of Silla named Gang Guryeo happened to be living in Wa.

Jesang entrusted him with accompanying Mihae safely home.

Jesang's Sacrifice

After Mihae departed, Jesang entered the prince's chamber and remained there until morning.

When the attendants arrived, Jesang told them:

"Lord Mihae is exhausted from yesterday's hunt and cannot yet rise."

Only later, when evening came, did they become suspicious.

When questioned again, Jesang calmly replied:

"Has Lord Mihae not already been gone for quite some time?"

The attendants immediately informed the king of Wa.

Horsemen were dispatched in pursuit but failed to capture Mihae.

Jesang was arrested and brought before the king.

The king demanded:

"Why did you secretly send away the prince?"

Jesang answered:

"I am a servant of Silla, not a servant of Wa. I acted only to fulfill the command of my own king.vHow could I have revealed my intentions?"

The king attempted to persuade him:

"You once declared yourself my subject. If you now admit you belong to Wa, I shall reward you with rank and wealth. But if you continue to call yourself a subject of Silla, you shall suffer the Five Punishments."

Jesang replied:

"I would rather be a dog or pig of Gyerim than become a subject of Wa. I would rather suffer punishment from the king of Gyerim than receive rewards from Wa."

Enraged, the king ordered the skin removed from the soles of Jesang's feet.

Reeds were spread across the ground, and Jesang was forced to walk over them while repeatedly being asked:

"Of which country are you a subject?"

Jesang answered only:

"I am a subject of Silla."

The people later said that bloodstains visible upon the reeds were Jesang's own blood.

He was next forced to stand upon a heated iron plate.

Again he was asked:

"Of which country are you a subject?"

Jesang answered:

"I am a subject of Silla."

Realizing that Jesang could never be persuaded to submit, the king ordered him burned to death on Mokdo Island.

The Return of Mihae

After safely crossing the sea, Mihae sent Gang Guryeo ahead to report his return.

King Nulji rejoiced beyond measure.

He ordered all the officials of the kingdom to go out as far as Gulheol Station to welcome the prince.

The king himself, together with Bohae, received Mihae outside the southern gate of the capital.

A great banquet followed within the palace, and a general amnesty was proclaimed throughout the kingdom.

In recognition of Jesang's loyalty, the king bestowed the title Gukdaebuin ("Great Lady of the State") upon Jesang's widow.

He also arranged for Jesang's daughter to become the wife of Prince Mihae.

The Death of Jesang's Wife

When Jesang had first departed, his wife pursued him but failed to reach him before his ship sailed.

She threw herself upon the sand south of the gate of Mangdeoksa Temple and wept for a long time.

Later two of her relatives attempted to bring her home.

She refused to stand, remaining seated upon the ground with her legs stretched before her.

For this reason the place became known as Beoljiji.

Unable to endure the grief of separation, Jesang's wife eventually took her three daughters and climbed Chisullyeong Pass, located between present-day Oedong-eup in Gyeongju and Dudong-myeon in Ulju.

Looking across the sea toward Wa, she wept bitterly until she died.

He notes that her shrine still remained in his own day.

The Accession of King Nulji

In the gyechuk year (413 A.D.), corresponding to the ninth year of the Yixi era under Emperor An of the Eastern Jin, a great bridge was constructed at Pyeongyangju.

During this period, King Silseong became jealous of Crown Prince Nulji's growing virtue and popularity and secretly plotted his death.

He requested soldiers from Goguryeo under the pretense of escorting the crown prince.

When the Goguryeo soldiers encountered Nulji, however, they recognized his benevolent character.

Rather than assassinate him, they turned their weapons against King Silseong, killed him, installed Nulji upon the throne, and returned to Goguryeo.

Notes:

Jesang's death is a loyalty-martyrdom motif, but the aftermath becomes sacred geography: blood-marked reeds, places named from his wife's grief, and his wife transforming into the Spirit Mother of Chisullyeong. The political section on Silseong/Nulji also has a "virtue recognized by enemies" motif: the foreign soldiers reverse the assassination and enthrone the virtuous prince.

The Crow, the Rat, and the Letter from Seochulji

In the mujin year (488 A.D.), the tenth year after the twenty-first ruler of Silla, King Bicheo (also known as King Soji), ascended the throne, the king visited Cheoncheonjeong Pavilion.

While there, a crow and a rat appeared and cried out together.

Suddenly, the rat spoke with a human voice:

"Observe where this crow goes."

The king therefore ordered mounted soldiers to follow the crow.

When they reached Pichon to the south, identified as present-day Yangpisa Village at the eastern foot of Namsan, they found two pigs fighting one another.

Finding the scene unusual, they paused to watch.

During this delay they lost sight of the crow and wandered aimlessly along the roadside.

At that moment an old man emerged from the water and handed them a sealed letter.

Upon the outside of the envelope was written:

"If this is opened, two people will die. If it is not opened, one person will die."

The soldiers returned and presented the letter to the king.

King Soji said:

"It is better that only one person should die than two. Therefore it should remain unopened."

The royal diviner then advised:

"The two people represent the common people. The one person represents the king."

Accepting this interpretation, the king opened the letter.

Inside were only the words:

"Shoot the geomungo case."

The king immediately returned to the palace and fired an arrow into the geomungo case.

Inside he discovered a monk who practiced incense-burning cultivation together with a palace lady.

The two had secretly committed adultery and were immediately executed.

The Origin of the Crow Festival

Each year, during the first month, on the first hae, ja, and o days, the people refrained from careless actions and observed these days with particular caution.

The fifteenth day became known as Ogi-il ("Crow Taboo Day"), when offerings of glutinous rice were presented.

Among the common people the observance was called Daldo, a native term referring to a heavenly rite of the first month associated with reverence, mourning, and abstaining from ordinary activities.

The pond from which the old man emerged bearing the letter afterward became known as Seochulji, meaning "The Pond from Which the Writing Emerged."

King Jijeung

The twenty-second ruler of Silla was King Jicheollo.

His family name was Kim, his personal name was Jidaero (also written Jidoro), and his posthumous title became King Jijeung.

Likewise, the native royal title Maripgan first came into use at this time.

King Jijeung ascended the throne in the gyeongjin year (500 A.D.), corresponding to the second year of the Yongyuan era.

The Marriage of King Jijeung

The king therefore dispatched ministers along three different roads to search for an appropriate bride.

One minister arrived beneath the Dongnosu tree in Moryang-bu.

There he observed two dogs fiercely pulling at opposite ends of a lump of dung as large as a drum.

Finding this unusual, the officials questioned a young girl nearby.

She answered:

"The daughter of the high official of Moryang-bu had been washing clothes here. She then hid among the bushes and relieved herself."

The officials investigated the household.

They found that the young woman measured seven ja and five chi in height.

When this was reported to the king, he sent a royal carriage to escort her to the palace, where she became Queen Yeonje.

All the ministers rejoiced.

The Submission of Ureungdo

The island measured 26,730 paces in circumference.

Its inhabitants relied upon the surrounding sea for protection, behaved arrogantly, and refused to offer tribute.

King Jijeung therefore ordered Ichan Bak Ijong, also known as Isabu, to lead an expedition against the island.

Isabu constructed wooden lions and loaded them aboard his ships.

He warned the islanders:

"If you do not surrender, I shall release these lions upon your island."

Terrified by the threat, the islanders submitted without resistance.

The king rewarded Isabu by appointing him governor of the province.

King Jinheung

The twenty-fourth ruler of Silla, King Jinheung, ascended the throne at the age of fifteen.

Because of his youth, the Queen Dowager governed as regent.

She was the daughter of King Beopheung and the wife of Ipjong Galmun-wang.

Before his death, King Jinheung shaved his head, put on Buddhist robes, and passed away.

During the ninth month of the third year of the Chengsheng era (554 A.D.), Baekje invaded Jinseong, carrying away 39,000 men and women together with 9,000 horses.

King Jinheung had replied:

"The rise and fall of kingdoms rests with Heaven. If Heaven does not hate Goguryeo, how could I dare hope for its destruction?"

These words were conveyed to Goguryeo.

Deeply moved by the king's sincerity, Goguryeo maintained peaceful relations with Silla.

Baekje, however, came to resent Silla and eventually launched its invasion.

King Jinji and Dohwa

The twenty-fifth ruler, King Saryun, received the posthumous title Great King Jinji.

His family name was Kim, and his queen was Lady Jido, daughter of Gio-gong.

He ascended the throne in the byeongsin year (576 A.D.), corresponding to the eighth year of the Dajian era under Emperor Xuan of Chen.

King Jinji ruled for only four years.

Because government fell into disorder and the king indulged excessively in sensual pleasures, the people eventually deposed him.

At that time there lived in Saryang-bu an exceptionally beautiful married woman known as Dohwa-nyeo ("Peach Blossom Woman").

The king summoned her to the palace and sought to make her his consort.

She answered:

"A woman does not serve two husbands. Since I already have a husband, even the authority of a king cannot compel me to violate my chastity."

The king asked:

“What if I were to kill you?"

She replied:

”I would rather die than abandon my loyalty."

The king continued:

"What if your husband were no longer alive?"

She answered:

"Only then might such a thing be possible."
The king dismissed her.

That same year King Jinji was deposed and died.

Two years later Dohwa's husband also passed away.

Ten days afterward, the former king appeared in her chamber as though still alive and said:

"You once gave me your word. Now that your husband has died, will you keep your promise?"

Dohwa first consulted her parents.

They answered:

"How could one refuse the command of a king?"

They therefore permitted her to receive him.

The king remained with her for seven days.

Throughout that time five-colored clouds covered the house and a sweet fragrance filled the room.

At the end of the seventh day he disappeared.

Soon afterward Dohwa became pregnant.

When the time of birth arrived, heaven and earth shook.

She gave birth to a son, who was named Bihyeong.

Bihyeong-rang and the Ghost Bridge

When Great King Jinpyeong learned of the child's birth, he brought Bihyeong into the palace and raised him.

At the age of fifteen the king appointed him to the office of jipsa.

Each night, however, Bihyeong secretly left the palace.

Despite the king assigning fifty swift soldiers to watch him, he repeatedly flew over Wolseong Fortress and went to the hill west of Hwangcheon, where he spent the night playing among ghosts and spirits.

The soldiers hid themselves and witnessed these events.

Whenever the dawn bells sounded from the surrounding temples, the ghosts scattered, and Bihyeong returned to the palace.

When questioned by the king, Bihyeong admitted the story was true.

The king then asked:

"If this is so, command the ghosts to build a bridge over the stream north of Sinwonsa Temple."

Bihyeong gathered the spirits and ordered them to cut and shape great stones.

Within a single night they completed the bridge.

For this reason it became known as Gwigungyo, the Ghost Bridge.

The king then asked:

"Is there among these spirits one who could assist in governing the kingdom?"

Bihyeong replied:

"There is one named Gildal who is worthy."

The next day Bihyeong presented Gildal before the king.

The king appointed him to the office of jipsa.

Gildal proved both loyal and capable, surpassing all others.

At that time Imjong, who held the rank of Gakgan, had no son.

The king therefore ordered him to adopt Gildal.

Imjong later had Gildal construct a gate tower south of Heungnyunsa Temple.

Because Gildal slept upon its roof each night, it became known as Gildalmun ("Gate of Gildal").

Eventually Gildal transformed himself into a fox and fled.

Bihyeong ordered the spirits to pursue and kill him.

Thereafter, whenever ghosts heard the name Bihyeong-rang, they fled in fear.

The people composed the following verse:

"The spirit of the holy king has begotten a son. This is the house of Bihyeong-rang. You wandering spirits who leap and fly. Do not dare linger here."

King Jinpyeong's Heavenly Belt

In the fifth month of the jeongyu year (937 A.D.), corresponding to the fourth year of the Cheongtae era, King Gyeongsun (Kim Bu) presented Taejo of Goryeo with a jade belt inlaid with gold.

The belt measured ten wi in length and bore sixty-two ornaments.

It was known as King Jinpyeong's Heavenly-Bestowed Belt.

Taejo preserved it within the royal treasury.

King Jinpyeong

The twenty-sixth ruler of Silla was King Baekjeong, posthumously known as Great King Jinpyeong.

He ascended the throne in the eighth month of the gihae year (579 A.D.), corresponding to the eleventh year of the Dajian era.

While ascending the stone steps of Naejeseok Palace, also called Cheonjusa Temple, three great stones broke beneath his feet.

The king instructed his ministers:

"Do not move these stones. Preserve them so that future generations may see them."

During the first year of his reign, a heavenly messenger descended into the palace courtyard and declared:

"The Supreme Emperor commands that I deliver this jade belt to you."

The king knelt and received the gift.

The heavenly messenger then ascended back into heaven.

Thereafter, whenever King Jinpyeong performed the great rites to Heaven, Earth, and the royal ancestors, he always wore the Heavenly-Bestowed Belt.

Later, when the king of Goguryeo considered invading Silla, he asked:

"It is said that Silla possesses three treasures and therefore cannot be conquered. What are they?"

He was told:

"The first is the Jangnyuk Buddha of Hwangnyongsa Temple. The second is the Nine-Story Pagoda of Hwangnyongsa. The third is King Jinpyeong's jade belt bestowed by Heaven."

Upon hearing this, the king of Goguryeo abandoned the proposed invasion.

Notes:

This is a major supernatural lineage passage. We have posthumous royal visitation, seven-day union, five-colored clouds, fragrance filling the room, heaven-and-earth trembling at birth, a child who flies over Wolseong, commands ghost labor, builds a bridge overnight, appoints a ghost into government, and destroys a fox-transforming spirit. This is not a craft/egg motif, but it is a strong spirit-hybrid / liminal child / command over non-human beings motif.

This spread gives us a clear heaven-sent sacred object motif: a heavenly messenger descends into the palace courtyard, delivers a jade belt by command of the Supreme Emperor, then ascends back into heaven. The object becomes one of Silla's three protective treasures, powerful enough that Goguryeo abandons an invasion plan. We also have giant king / immense body, broken stone steps, and immovable stones as sacred-place markers.

Queen Seondeok

The twenty-seventh ruler of Silla was Queen Deokman, posthumously known as Queen Seondeok.

Her family name was Kim, and she was the daughter of King Jinpyeong.

She ascended the throne in the imjin year (632 A.D.), corresponding to the sixth year of the Zhenguan era under Emperor Taizong of Tang, and ruled the kingdom for sixteen years.

The Fragrant Peonies

Tang Taizong once sent Queen Seondeok a painting depicting peonies in three colors—red, purple, and white—together with three doe of peony seeds.

After examining the painting, the queen remarked:

"These flowers will certainly have no fragrance."

The seeds were planted within the palace courtyard.

When they eventually blossomed, the flowers proved entirely without fragrance, exactly as the queen had foretold.

The Frogs of Okmunji

On another occasion, during the middle of winter, large numbers of frogs gathered at Okmunji Pond within Yeongmyosa Temple and croaked continuously for three or four days.

The people regarded this as an unusual omen and sought the queen's interpretation.

Queen Seondeok summoned the gakgan officials Alcheon and Piltan and instructed them:

"Take two thousand soldiers and immediately proceed to the western outskirts. Search the place called Yeogeun-gok (Woman-Root Valley). Enemy soldiers will certainly be hidden there. Attack them and destroy them."

The two commanders each led one thousand soldiers westward.

After locating Yeogeun-gok below Busan Mountain, they discovered five hundred Baekje soldiers lying in ambush.

Every one of them was killed.

Nearby, the Baekje general Uso lay concealed upon a rocky height at Namsan Pass.

The Silla forces surrounded the position and killed him with arrows.

Soon afterward they encountered a reinforcing force of 1,300 Baekje soldiers and likewise destroyed them completely.

The Queen's Own Death

Although Queen Seondeok suffered from no illness, she one day told her ministers:

"I shall die in such-and-such year, such-and-such month, and such-and-such day. Bury me in the middle of Doricheon (Trāyastriṃśa Heaven)."

The ministers, not understanding her words, asked:

"Where is that place?"

She answered:

"South of Nangsan Mountain."

Exactly as she had predicted, the queen died on the appointed day.

Following her instructions, the ministers buried her south of Nangsan.

More than ten years later, Great King Munmu constructed Sacheonwangsa (Temple of the Four Heavenly Kings) immediately below her tomb.

Only then did people realize the meaning of the queen's words.

Since Buddhist scripture teaches that Trāyastriṃśa Heaven lies above the Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings, they recognized the depth of Queen Seondeok's divine foresight.

The Queen Explains Her Omens

While Queen Seondeok was still alive, several ministers asked how she had correctly interpreted both the peony painting and the frogs.

The queen replied:

"Because there were no butterflies painted among the flowers, I knew the blossoms would possess no fragrance. The Tang emperor was mocking me for having no husband.

"The frogs appeared angry because they represented soldiers. Okmun ('Jade Gate') signifies the female generative organ. Woman belongs to yin, yin corresponds to the color white, and white signifies the west. Therefore I knew enemy soldiers were concealed in the west.

"When the male generative organ enters the female generative organ, it must die. From this I knew the enemy would be easily defeated."

All the ministers greatly admired the queen's wisdom.

Another text further records:

"During the reign of Queen Seondeok, stones were cut and Cheomseongdae Observatory was constructed."

Queen Jindeok

The twenty-eighth ruler of Silla, Queen Jindeok, succeeded to the throne after Queen Seondeok.

Queen Jindeok personally composed the Taepyeongga ("Song of Great Peace").

The poem was embroidered upon silk and sent by envoy to the Tang emperor.
Lord Chunchu had already ascended the throne and that the gyeongsin year of Xianqing properly belongs to the reign of Emperor Gaozong, when Su Dingfang conducted his campaigns.

The Tang emperor greatly admired Queen Jindeok and formally invested her as King of Gyerim-guk.

The text preserves the Taepyeongga as follows:

Great Tang has established the work of kingship;

The lofty achievements of the emperor flourish.

When war ceases, all under Heaven is pacified;

Through civil rule he follows the hundred kings.

He governs Heaven, and precious rain descends;

He rules all things, and everything receives light.

His deep benevolence is like the sun and moon;

His virtue surpasses Yao and Shun.

How brightly the fluttering banners shine;

How majestic the sounding drums!

Those who oppose the emperor's command shall surely perish.

Gentle customs spread throughout the land;

From near and far, people compete to offer tribute.

The harmony of the four seasons brings great peace;

The Seven Luminaries shine upon every direction.

The vital spirit of the mountains gives birth to ministers worthy of serving the throne.

The virtues of the Five Emperors and Three Sovereigns are united in one;

May the Tang imperial house shine forever.

The Lords of Ujiam

During Queen Jindeok's reign, the great nobles Alcheon-gong, Imjong-gong, Suljong-gong, Horim-gong (father of Jajang), Yeomjang-gong, and Yusin-gong assembled at Ujiam Rock upon Namsan to deliberate affairs of state.

During their meeting a great tiger suddenly leapt into their midst.

The assembled lords immediately rose in alarm.

Alcheon-gong alone remained seated.

Calmly continuing his conversation, he seized the tiger by the tail, threw it to the ground, and killed it.

Although Alcheon-gong possessed such extraordinary strength and occupied the seat of highest honor, all those present nevertheless acknowledged the authority and dignity of Yusin-gong.

The Four Sacred Lands of Silla

These sacred lands were:

Cheongsongsan in the east.
Ujisan in the south.
Pijeon in the west.
Geumgangsan in the north.

Whenever matters of state were discussed at these places, they were always successfully accomplished.

The Birth of Kim Yusin

Kim Yusin was the eldest son of Seohyeon, who held the office of gakgan.

Seohyeon himself was the son of Kim Muryeok, who held the rank of igan, also called ichan.

Yusin's younger brother was Heumsun.

His elder sister was Bohui, whose childhood name was Ahae, and his younger sister was Munhui, whose childhood name was Aji.

Kim Yusin was born in the eulmyo year (595 A.D.), during the seventeenth year of King Jinpyeong.

For this reason, the pattern of the Seven Stars appeared upon his back, and many mysterious events surrounded him from birth.

Baekseok's Deception

In the imsin year, when Yusin reached the age of eighteen, he mastered swordsmanship and became a gukseon (Hwarang leader).

At that time a man named Baekseok joined the Hwarang.

No one knew from where he had come.

For several years he remained among Yusin's followers.

When Baekseok learned that Yusin intended to conquer both Goguryeo and Baekje, he proposed:

"Permit me to accompany you into those kingdoms. I shall first investigate them, and afterward we may make our plans."

Yusin accepted the proposal, and the two departed secretly at night.

While resting upon a mountain pass, two women appeared and quietly followed them.

Later, after reaching Golhwacheon another woman joined them.

Yusin conversed pleasantly with the three women.

They offered him fine fruit, which he accepted, and they soon became familiar with one another.

The women then said:

"We have heard everything you and Baekseok have discussed. Leave him and enter the forest with us, and we will reveal the truth."

Yusin followed them into the forest.

There the three women suddenly revealed themselves as guardian deities.

They declared:

"We are the guardian deities of Naerim, Gyeongju Namsan, Hyeollye at Osan, and Golhwa at Geumgangsan in Yeongcheon.

"The man accompanying you comes from an enemy kingdom. He is deceiving you, yet you do not perceive it.

"Therefore we have come to prevent you from following him."

Having spoken, the three guardian deities disappeared.

Yusin was greatly astonished.

He bowed twice and returned from the forest.

That evening, while lodging at Golhwagwan, he said to Baekseok:

"As we prepare to enter another country, I have remembered that I left important documents behind. Let us return home together."

After returning, Yusin arrested Baekseok and subjected him to questioning.

Baekseok finally confessed:

"I am originally a man of Goguryeo."

Notes:

Queen Seondeok is a major prophetic-queen / symbolic decoding figure. She reads hidden meaning from images, animals, colors, directions, yin-yang symbolism, and place-names. Key motifs: fragrance-less peony, absence of butterflies, winter frogs as military omen, Jade Gate / hidden valley, west/white/yin correspondence, foreknown death, and burial aligned with Buddhist cosmic geography.

There is also a cosmic-imperial order motif through the Taepyeongga: Heaven, rain, sun and moon, Seven Luminaries, mountains producing ministers, and the emperor as world-ordering figure. The end adds a tiger intrusion / heroic strength motif: a sacred council is interrupted by a tiger, and Alcheon subdues it with supernatural composure.

Kim Yusin is marked by a celestial birth-sign: the essence of the Big Dipper / Seven Stars appears on his back. This is a strong “star-lineage / heavenly imprint” motif. The three women are also important: they appear as ordinary women, lure him into the forest, reveal themselves as guardian deities of sacred lands, and save him from an enemy infiltrator. This gives us: sacred geography, deity-disguise, fruit offering, forest revelation, vanished beings, and guardian intervention

Chunam's Prophecy

The ministers of Goguryeo explained Baekseok's true identity by recounting an earlier tradition concerning a diviner named Chunam.

They said:

"Yusin of Silla was originally our country's diviner, Chunam."

According to the account, an unusual omen once appeared along the frontier of Goguryeo when the waters of a river began flowing backward.

The king therefore summoned Chunam to interpret the omen.

Chunam declared:

"This sign has appeared because the great king's queen has reversed the proper order of yin and yang."

The king was astonished.

The queen, however, became furious and denounced Chunam as a deceitful fox.

She urged the king to test him with another matter and, if he proved mistaken, to execute him.

A mouse was secretly hidden inside a box.

The king then asked Chunam what object lay concealed within it.

Chunam replied:

"It is certainly a mouse, and its number is eight."

The court declared that his answer was incorrect and prepared to execute him.

Before his death Chunam proclaimed:

"After I die, I shall become a great general and will surely destroy Goguryeo."

The king immediately ordered his execution.

Afterward the mouse's body was opened.

Inside were seven unborn young.

Only then did everyone realize that Chunam's answer had been correct.

That very night the king dreamed that Chunam entered the bosom of the wife of Lord Seohyeon of Silla.

When the king related the dream, the ministers declared:

"Chunam swore this oath before his death, and now it has indeed come to pass. That is why he has come to Silla."

They concluded that Baekseok had been sent to prevent the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Kim Yusin's Offering

After exposing Baekseok's deception, Kim Yusin put him to death.

He then prepared abundant offerings of food and performed sacrifices to the Three Deities.

The deities themselves appeared and accepted the offerings.

Lady Jaemae

When Lady Jaemae of the Kim clan died, she was buried at Sanggok in Cheongyeon.

For this reason the valley afterward became known as Jaemaegok.

Each spring the entire household gathered beside the southern stream of the valley to hold a commemorative feast.

At that season countless flowers blossomed, while pine blossoms filled the inner valley.

A hermitage was constructed at the entrance of the valley and named Songhwa-bang ("Pine-Blossom Hermitage").

It was established as a wonchal, a temple dedicated to prayer and religious vows.

By the reign of the fifty-fourth ruler, King Gyeongmyeong, Kim Yusin had been posthumously honored with the title Great King Heungmu.

His tomb was located upon the ridge extending northeast from Mojisa Temple on Seosan (the Western Mountain).

Great King Taejong

The twenty-ninth ruler of Silla was Great King Taejong.

His personal name was Chunchu, and his family name was Kim.

His father was Yongsu, also known as Yongchun, who held the office of gakgan and was posthumously honored as Great King Munheung.

His mother was Lady Cheonmyeong, daughter of Great King Jinpyeong.

His queen was Lady Munhui, younger sister of Kim Yusin.

Bohui's Dream

One day Bohui, the elder sister of Munhui, dreamed that she climbed Seoak (the Western Mountain), urinated, and filled the entire capital with her urine.

The following morning she recounted the dream to her younger sister.

Munhui immediately said:

"I will buy that dream."

Bohui asked:

"What will you give me in exchange?"

Munhui replied:

"Would a silk skirt be sufficient?"

Bohui agreed.

Munhui spread out the silk skirt before her, and Bohui declared:

"I now give you last night's dream."

Munhui then presented the skirt as payment.

Kim Chunchu and Munhui

Ten days later Kim Yusin and Lord Chunchu were playing ball before Yusin's residence.

The people of Silla referred to the game of kicking a ball as nongju-ui-hui ("the game of playing with the jewel").

During the game Yusin deliberately stepped upon Chunchu's clothing tie, causing it to come undone.

He then said:

"Come to my house, and we shall fasten it again."

Lord Chunchu accepted the invitation.

Yusin first instructed his elder sister Bohui (Ahae) to repair the garment.

She declined, saying:

"How could I approach a noble young lord over so small a matter?"

Yusin therefore summoned his younger sister Munhui.

As she repaired the garment, Lord Chunchu perceived Yusin's intention.

From that time onward Chunchu and Munhui gradually became close, and Chunchu frequently visited Yusin's household.

Munhui's Pregnancy

Some time later Yusin learned that Munhui had become pregnant.

He sternly rebuked her:

"How could you become pregnant without first informing our parents?"

He then deliberately spread word throughout the kingdom that he intended to burn his younger sister to death.

One day, after Queen Seondeok had departed for Namsan, Yusin piled wood in the center of the courtyard and set it ablaze.

The smoke rose high into the sky and could be seen even from the mountain.

Queen Seondeok noticed the smoke and asked her attendants about it.

The ministers replied:

"It appears that Yusin intends to burn his younger sister."

The queen asked why.

They answered:

"Because she secretly became pregnant."

The queen then asked:

"Who is responsible?"

At that moment Lord Chunchu was standing nearby.

His face immediately changed color.

The queen observed:

"This matter was surely your doing. Go at once and save Yusin's sister."

Receiving the queen's command, Lord Chunchu mounted his horse, hurried to Yusin's residence, and presented the royal order.

Munhui's life was spared.

Thereafter the marriage between Chunchu and Munhui was formally celebrated.

The Reign of Taejong

Following the death of Queen Jindeok, Lord Chunchu ascended the throne in the gapin year (654 A.D.), corresponding to the fifth year of the Yonghui era.

He ruled for eight years.

In the sinyu year (661 A.D.), the first year of the Longshuo era, he died at the age of fifty-nine.

He was buried east of Aegongsa Temple, where a memorial stele was erected.

Because King Taejong and Kim Yusin together accomplished the unification of the Three Kingdoms and established enduring merit for the kingdom, he received the temple name Taejong.

His sons by Queen Munhui included Crown Prince Beommin together with the gakgan officials Inmun, Munwang, Nocha, Jigyeong, and Gaewon.

By secondary consorts the king also had Gaejimun, who became a geupgan; Chadeuk, who became a yeonggong; Madeuk, who became an agan; together with a daughter, five children in all.

The Character of King Taejong

After the conquest of Baekje in the gyeongsin year (660 A.D.), however, he abandoned the midday meal and thereafter ate only breakfast and evening supper.

During his reign prices within the capital became extremely high.

One bolt of cloth cost between thirty and fifty seok of grain.

Despite these hardships, the people nevertheless remembered his reign as the age of a sage king.

Before ascending the throne, while still Crown Prince, Chunchu traveled to Tang China to request military assistance against Goguryeo.

The Tang emperor admired his bearing and declared him to be a man of sacred character.

The emperor earnestly wished to retain him in Tang service.

Chunchu, however, firmly refused and returned to Silla.

King Uija of Baekje

King Uija was the eldest son of King Mu.

He was renowned for both courage and determination.

Because of his exceptional filial devotion toward his parents and his affection for his brothers, the people honored him as the "Zengzi of Haedong," comparing him to the celebrated Chinese exemplar of filial piety.

Notes:

This spread is major. Kim Yusin is framed as the rebirth of Chunam, a Goguryeo diviner who was unjustly executed and vowed to return as a general who would destroy Goguryeo. The dream of Chunam entering the bosom of Seohyeon's wife functions like a reincarnation/conception motif. We also get reversed water / reversed yin-yang, hidden mouse divination, prophetic death-oath, Three Deities

appearing to receive offerings, sacred family valley, and then the beginning of Munhui buying Bohui's dream, another powerful destiny-transfer motif.

This also completes the dream-transfer destiny motif. Bohui's dream is bought by Munhui, and the result becomes royal marriage, royal offspring, and eventually Taejong's line. Yusin's staged fire is also a ritualized public pressure / smoke-signal intervention motif: smoke rises to Heaven, Queen Seondeok reads the situation, Chunchu is exposed by his changed face, and royal command converts scandal into dynastic marriage.

The Final Warnings to King Uija

When King Uija ascended the throne in the sinchuk year (641 A.D.), corresponding to the fifteenth year of the Zhenguan era, he gradually became absorbed in wine and women.

Government affairs fell into disorder, and the kingdom steadily declined.

Seongchung, who held the office of jwapyeong, repeatedly admonished the king with loyal counsel.

King Uija refused to listen.

Instead, he imprisoned Seongchung.

As Seongchung's health deteriorated and death approached, he submitted one final memorial to the king.

He wrote:

"A loyal minister does not forget his ruler even in death. Before I die, I wish to offer one final piece of advice. For a long time I have observed the course of events, and I am certain that war is coming. Whenever armies are deployed, one must carefully choose favorable terrain. If the enemy is met before crossing the upper reaches of the rivers, the kingdom may yet be preserved. Should hostile armies invade by land, they must be prevented from crossing Tanhyeon, also called Chimhyeon, a strategic fortress of Baekje. Should they come by sea, they must be prevented from entering Gibeolpo, also known as Jangam, Sonlyang, Jihwapo, or Baekgang. Establish your forces upon defensible ground and block the enemy's advance."

King Uija ignored every word of Seongchung's memorial.

Omens Before the Fall

The Red Horse

In the gimi year (659 A.D.), corresponding to the fourth year of the Xianqing era, a great red horse appeared at Ohoesa Temple, also called Ohapsa Temple.

The horse wandered throughout the temple grounds day and night for six hours before disappearing.

Foxes in the Palace

During the second month, several foxes entered the royal palace.

One white fox climbed upon the desk of a jwapyeong official and remained there.

The Sparrow and the Hen

In the fourth month, a hen within the Crown Prince's Palace mated with a small sparrow.

The Great Fish of the Sabi River

During the fifth month, an enormous fish emerged from the Sabi River (the Baengma River) and died upon the riverbank.

The fish measured approximately thirty ja in length.

Note: Sudden environmental changes can produce large fish die-offs, the most common causes being oxygen depletion resulting from extreme heat, biological decay, or pollution.

The Crying Pagoda Tree

During the ninth month, the pagoda tree within the royal palace cried out with a sound like a human voice.

That same night, a ghost was heard weeping upon the road south of the palace.

Omens of the Gyeongsin Year

In the second month of the gyeongsin year (660 A.D.), corresponding to the fifth year of the Xianqing era, the capital experienced still more extraordinary signs.

The wells of the city turned blood-red.

Along the western seacoast countless small fish came ashore and died.

No matter how many were gathered and eaten, their numbers did not diminish.

Note: Such events may reflect sudden environmental changes, most commonly oxygen depletion caused by extreme heat, biological decay, or pollution.

During the fourth month, tens of thousands of frogs gathered in the trees.

Note: Frogs are known to assemble in unusually large numbers during synchronized life-cycle events, often triggered by changing weather conditions.

The inhabitants of the capital became seized by irrational fear.

Many fled as though pursued by an unseen force.

More than one hundred people died in panic, and the amount of property abandoned during the confusion could not be counted.

The Ghost of Wangheungsa

During the sixth month, while the monks of Wangheungsa Temple watched, a strange sight appeared.

A boat seemed to ride upon a great wave and pass directly through the temple gate.

Soon afterward an enormous dog, as large as a deer, came from the west to the bank of the Sabi River.

Facing the royal palace, it barked continuously for a long time before suddenly vanishing.

At the same time, the dogs within the capital gathered together along the streets.

They barked and howled for a considerable time before finally dispersing.

Then a ghost entered the palace and cried aloud:

"Baekje will fall. Baekje will fall."

Immediately afterward the apparition disappeared beneath the earth.

The Turtle's Prophecy

The king ordered the place where the ghost vanished to be excavated.

Approximately three ja below the surface, a turtle was discovered.

An inscription was written upon its shell:

"Baekje is like the full moon. Silla is like the new crescent moon."

King Uija summoned a shaman and requested an interpretation.

The shaman replied:

"The full moon has reached complete fullness. Once full, it must inevitably begin to wane. The new crescent moon has not yet reached fullness. From this time onward it will steadily increase."

King Uija became enraged and ordered the shaman executed.

Another interpreter then offered a different explanation:

"The full moon is complete, while the crescent moon is still weak. Does this not signify that Baekje will flourish while Silla declines?"

Pleased by this interpretation, the king accepted it.

Silla Appeals to Tang

King Taejong Muyeol of Silla learned of the many extraordinary disturbances occurring throughout Baekje.

Recognizing them as signs of instability within his rival kingdom, he dispatched Kim Inmun to Tang China in the gyeongsin year (660 A.D.) to request military assistance.

Notes:

This is a major collapse-omen cluster. Baekje's fall is preceded by abnormal animals, poisoned giant fish, inexhaustible dead fish, frogs in trees, blood-red wells, weeping trees, palace ghosts, dogs howling, a spectral cry of "Baekje will fall," and a turtle with prophetic writing on its shell. The key interpretive pattern is: corrupt ruler ignores loyal warning → nature becomes inverted/abnormal → animals and spirits announce collapse → prophecy is misread by power → kingdom falls.

The Tang Campaign Against Baekje

Emperor Gaozong of Tang appointed Su Dingfang, Duke of Xing and Grand General of the Left Courageous Guard, as Commander-in-Chief of the Shingudo Campaign Army.

He placed under his command Liu Boying (courtesy name Renyuan), General of the Left Guard; Feng Shigui, General of the Left Courageous Guard; Pang Xiaogong, General of the Left Courageous Guard; together with many other commanders.

The expedition consisted of 130,000 troops and was ordered to invade Baekje.

At the same time, Emperor Gaozong appointed King Chunchu of Silla as Commander of the Uido Campaign Army, instructing him to unite the forces of Silla with those of Tang.

Su Dingfang departed from Seongsan, present-day Wendeng County in Shandong, crossed the sea, and reached Deongmuldo Island west of Silla, identified as present-day Deokjeokdo.

King Chunchu ordered General Kim Yusin to lead 50,000 elite soldiers to join the Tang expedition.

The Debate in Baekje

When King Uija learned that the Tang and Silla armies were advancing, he assembled his ministers and requested advice on how the kingdom should defend itself.

Uijik, who held the office of jwapyeong, spoke first:

"The Tang army has crossed the sea from a distant land and is unfamiliar with naval warfare. The Silla army relies entirely upon the support of a great empire and therefore underestimates Baekje. If the Tang army should suffer defeat, Silla will surely become fearful and hesitate to advance. Therefore we should attack the Tang army first."

Sangyeong, who held the rank of dalsol, together with several other ministers, opposed this proposal.

They said:

"That plan is mistaken. Because the Tang army has come from far away, it will seek a quick decision. We cannot withstand the force of its initial assault. The Silla army has often been defeated by us before. When they see our present strength, they will naturally fear us. We should first block the advance of the Tang forces and wait until they become exhausted. Then we should dispatch one detachment to strike the Silla army and break its fighting spirit. Afterward, when the proper opportunity appears, we may attack and preserve the kingdom without losing a single soldier."

King Uija hesitated and could not decide which course to follow.

The Counsel of Heungsu

At that time Heungsu, another jwapyeong, was living in exile at Gomamiji-hyeon, present-day Jangheung in South Jeolla Province.

The king sent a messenger asking:

"The kingdom is in great danger. What should we do?"

Heungsu replied:

"The proper course is exactly as Jwapyeong Seongchung advised."

The ministers immediately rejected this counsel.

They argued before the king:

"Heungsu bears resentment toward Your Majesty and therefore cannot truly desire the welfare of the kingdom. His advice cannot be trusted. Instead, our navy should occupy Baekgang (Gibeolpo) and sail downstream so that the enemy fleet cannot escape. Meanwhile the Silla army must pass through Tanhyeon, where the roads are so narrow that horses cannot ride abreast. There we should release our troops. Victory would then be as easy as catching chickens inside a coop or fish already trapped in a net."

King Uija answered:

"That plan is good."

The Battle of Hwangsan

Soon afterward King Uija learned that the Tang forces had already passed Baekgang while the Silla army had crossed Tanhyeon.

He therefore ordered General Gyebaek to lead five thousand death-defying soldiers to Hwangsan and confront the Silla army.

The Baekje army fought four engagements and won each one.

Eventually, however, their small numbers and complete exhaustion overcame them.

General Gyebaek fell in battle.

The Tang and Silla armies then united, reached Jingu, established their camps along the riverbank, and advanced together.

Kim Yusin and the Bird Omen

As the combined armies prepared for battle, a bird suddenly flew above Su Dingfang's camp.

Su Dingfang ordered divination of the omen.

The interpretation declared:

"This sign will surely bring harm to the commander."

Frightened by the prediction, Su Dingfang considered abandoning the campaign and returning home.

Kim Yusin addressed him:

"How can we reject an opportunity granted by Heaven merely because of the strange behavior of a bird? We act according to Heaven's will and fulfill the desires of the people by overthrowing a ruler who has become deeply without virtue. "How could such a cause possibly be inauspicious?"

Yusin then drew his divine sword and pointed it toward the bird.

Immediately the bird split apart and fell dead before the army.

Su Dingfang's fears disappeared.

He established his camp upon the left bank of the Baek River with the mountains behind him, and together the Tang and Silla armies attacked.

The Baekje army suffered a crushing defeat.

The Fall of Sabi

The Tang fleet advanced with the rising tide.

Their ships were lashed together as one formation.

Drums thundered, soldiers shouted, and the attack began.

Su Dingfang personally led both infantry and cavalry toward the capital, halting approximately thirty ri away.

Every available defender inside the fortress was mobilized.

Despite their efforts, the defenders were overwhelmed.

More than ten thousand people were killed.

Seizing the opportunity, the Tang army stormed into the fortress.

King Uija realized that escape had become impossible.

He sighed and declared:

"I regret that I did not heed the words of Seongchung. It is because of this that I have come to such an end."

He fled together with Crown Prince Yung toward the northern frontier.

The Surrender of Baekje

While Su Dingfang surrounded the capital, King Uija's second son, Prince Tae, proclaimed himself king and attempted to organize the defense.

The Crown Prince's son, Munsa, addressed him:

"The king has fled together with the Crown Prince, yet you have made yourself king by your own authority. If the Tang army should withdraw, how could we possibly remain safe afterward?"

Munsa then departed the fortress with his own followers.

The people followed him in great numbers, and Prince Tae could not restrain them.

Su Dingfang ordered his soldiers to scale the fortress walls and raise the Tang banner.

Recognizing that resistance had become hopeless, Prince Tae opened the gates and surrendered.

King Uija, Crown Prince Yung, Prince Tae, the minister Jeongbok, together with numerous fortress commanders, all submitted to Tang authority.

The Administration of Conquered Baekje

Su Dingfang sent King Uija, Crown Prince Yung, Prince Tae, Prince Yeon, eighty-eight ministers and distinguished warriors, together with 12,807 common people, to the Tang capital.

Baekje possessed:

Five administrative divisions.
Thirty-seven commanderies.
Two hundred fortresses.
760,000 households.

Tang reorganized the conquered territory into five protectorate commanderies:

Ungjin.
Mahan.
Dongmyeong.
Geumnyeon.
Deokan.

Local leaders were appointed as dodok (governors) and jasa (inspectors) to administer the region.

Liu Renyuan, a nangjang officer, was assigned to garrison Sabi Fortress.

Wang Wendu, Left Guard nangjang, became Governor of Ungjin and was charged with comforting the remaining people of Baekje.

The Death of King Uija

Su Dingfang escorted the prisoners before Emperor Gaozong.

The emperor sternly rebuked them but ultimately pardoned their offenses.

King Uija later fell ill and died in Tang territory.

The emperor posthumously bestowed upon him the honorary titles of Gold-Purple Guanglu Grand Master and Minister of the Palace Guards.

He permitted Uija's former ministers to mourn at his funeral.

King Uija was buried beside the tombs of Sun Hao, the final ruler of Wu and grandson of Sun Quan, and Chen Shubao, the last ruler of the Chen dynasty.

A memorial stele was also erected in his honor.

The Campaign Against Goguryeo

In the second year of Geonin (662 A.D.), Emperor Gaozong appointed Su Dingfang Grand Commander of the Liaodong Campaign Army.

Soon afterward he transferred him to command the Pyeongyang Campaign Army.

Su Dingfang defeated the Goguryeo forces at Paegang (the Daedong River), seized Maeupsan Mountain near Pyeongyang, and established his military headquarters there.

He then laid siege to Pyeongyang Fortress.

Before the siege could be completed, however, heavy snow fell.

Su Dingfang therefore lifted the siege and withdrew his army.

Notes:

This section is mainly strategic and historical, but it continues the earlier ignored-warning collapse motif. Seongchung's dying advice was correct, Heungsu repeats the same advice from exile, but King Uija trusts flattering ministers instead. The pattern is: loyal warning → corrupt court rejects it → wrong tactical choice → Gyebaek's heroic last stand → Baekje collapse advances.

This also gives us a sharp omen versus heroic will motif. Su Dingfang fears the bird-omen, but Kim Yusin overrides it by invoking Heaven's opportunity, then uses a divine sword to split the bird. The Baekje-collapse pattern also completes here: ignored loyal warning → wrong strategy → capital breach → internal royal division → surrender → removal of king and people to Tang.

The Oath Between Silla and Baekje

The Silla Separate Text records the following account.

In the eulchuk year (665 A.D.), the fifth year after King Munmu ascended the throne, during the autumn, on the gyeongja day of the eighth month, the king personally led a large force to Ungjin Fortress.

There he met Buyeo Yung, the provisional ruler of Baekje.

An altar was constructed, and a white horse was sacrificed to seal a solemn oath between the two kingdoms.

The ceremony began with offerings to the heavenly gods and to the spirits of the mountains and rivers.

The participants then smeared the blood of the sacrificial horse upon their mouths before reciting the oath.

The Oath

The oath declared:

"Formerly, the previous king of Baekje failed to understand the principles of loyalty and rebellion.

"He did not live peacefully with neighboring states, nor did he preserve harmony with those joined to him through marriage.

"Instead, he formed alliances with Goguryeo and maintained communication with Wa.

"Together they practiced cruelty and violence.

"They repeatedly invaded Silla, destroyed its fortresses and towns, and slaughtered its people, so that scarcely a single day passed in peace.

"The Son of Heaven of China pitied those who had lost their homes and felt compassion for those suffering oppression.

"He repeatedly dispatched envoys urging Baekje to live in harmony.

"Yet Baekje trusted in its distant location and difficult terrain, despised the Heavenly Mandate, and ignored the commands of the empire.

"Therefore the emperor became greatly angered and reverently carried out punishment.

"Wherever the imperial banners advanced, a single campaign was sufficient to pacify Baekje.

"Properly speaking, the palaces and houses of Baekje should have been destroyed, ponds dug where they once stood, its descendants warned, and the roots of evil completely removed, so that later generations might learn from this example.

"Yet to embrace those who submit while punishing only those who rebel has always been the noble law established by the former kings.

"Likewise, restoring a fallen kingdom and preserving an interrupted royal lineage has long been the shared principle of the wise and worthy rulers of antiquity.

"Since the ancient histories teach that present affairs should follow the models of former ages, We now appoint Buyeo Yung, former king of Baekje and Sagajeonggyeong, as Governor of Ungjin.

"Let him continue the ancestral sacrifices of Baekje and preserve its former territory.

"Let him rely upon Silla and forever remain a friendly neighboring state.

"Let both kingdoms abandon former resentment, establish lasting friendship, and live together in harmony.

"Receive the imperial command with reverence and forever remain a loyal subordinate state.

"Therefore We dispatch Liu Renyuan, General of the Right Guard and Duke of Lucheng County, to proclaim these commands personally and make Our intentions known.

"You shall establish marriage alliances between your kingdoms and renew this covenant.

"You shall sacrifice horses, dogs, and other animals, and smear their blood upon your mouths.

"You shall swear that this agreement shall remain firm from beginning to end.

"You shall help one another in preventing disasters, rescue one another during times of danger, and value each other's kindness as that shared between brothers.

"Respectfully uphold these imperial commands and never dare cast them aside.

"After this oath has been sworn, both kingdoms shall preserve loyalty and integrity.

"Should anyone violate this agreement, betray it, raise armies, or invade the other's borders, may the divine spirits witness the offense and send down countless calamities.

"May that person's descendants never prosper.

"May he lose the protection of the state altars.

"May his ancestral sacrifices cease forever, leaving no descendants to continue them.

"Therefore this covenant is inscribed upon gold and iron and deposited within the ancestral shrine.

"For ten thousand generations no descendant shall dare violate it.

"May the spirits hear these words, accept these offerings, and bestow their blessings."

Preservation of the Oath

After the ceremony concluded, the ritual silk offerings were buried north of the altar.

The written oath itself was deposited within the Great Shrine of Silla, the ancestral shrine of King Michu.

Earlier in the History of Tang, it was recorded that Su Dingfang carried both King Uija and Crown Prince Yung to the Tang capital following the conquest of Baekje.

The present account, however, records King Munmu meeting Buyeo Yung as the ruler of Ungjin.

The Tang emperor later pardoned Crown Prince Yung, restored him to authority, and appointed him Governor of Ungjin.

Because this fact is stated explicitly within the oath itself.

Notes:

This spread is a major blood-oath / treaty-sacrifice passage. The key ritual signs are: altar construction, white horse sacrifice, offerings to heavenly gods and mountain-river spirits, blood smeared on the mouth, oath text, curses against betrayal, a gold-written document, an iron credential, and storage of the oath in the ancestral shrine. This is political history, but expressed through sacred binding ritual.

The Tang Campaign Against Goguryeo

In the mujin year (668 A.D.), corresponding to the first year of the Zongzhang era, the text records that Tang relief forces, requested by Silla, were stationed outside Pyeongyang and urgently requested military provisions.

If the account instead concerns Su Dingfang, then the proper date would correspond to the imsul year, the second year of the Longshuo era, when he campaigned against Pyeongyang.

When the request for provisions arrived, the king of Silla gathered his ministers and said:

"To enter the territory of Goguryeo and reach the Tang camp is exceedingly dangerous. Yet because the Tang army came at our own request, it would be improper to refuse assistance now that their provisions have been exhausted. What should we do?"

Kim Yusin answered:

"We, your servants, will transport the provisions. Your Majesty need not be concerned."

Kim Yusin, Kim Inmun, and other commanders therefore led tens of thousands of soldiers into Goguryeo territory.

They successfully delivered 20,000 gok (hu) of military grain before safely returning.

The king was greatly pleased.

Wonhyo Interprets the Tang Message

Later, Kim Yusin prepared another expedition to join the Tang army.

Before advancing, he dispatched two scouts, Yeongi and Byeongcheon, to investigate the situation.

The Tang commander Su Dingfang responded by sending a drawing depicting a luan-bird together with a calf.
The Silla commanders could not understand its meaning.

They therefore sought the interpretation of Master Wonhyo.

Wonhyo explained:

"The message means that the army must immediately turn back. The drawing of the calf and the luan-bird signifies that both undertakings are to be cut off."

Kim Yusin accepted Wonhyo's interpretation and immediately ordered the army to withdraw.

The Crossing of the Paegang River

While retreating, the army reached the Paegang River.

Kim Yusin issued a strict command:

"Whoever crosses last shall be beheaded."

The soldiers urged their horses forward and crossed as quickly as possible.

When roughly half the army had crossed, Goguryeo forces suddenly attacked those who still remained on the opposite bank.

Many Silla soldiers who had not yet crossed were killed.

On the following day, Kim Yusin pursued the Goguryeo army.

He defeated them and killed tens of thousands of enemy soldiers.

The Story of Su Dingfang's Plot

After Tang had subdued both Goguryeo and Baekje, Su Dingfang supposedly remained behind and intended to attack Silla as well.

Learning of this plan, Kim Yusin invited the Tang soldiers to a feast.

According to this account, he secretly poisoned them, killed them all, and buried their bodies together in a great pit.

After Goguryeo fell in the mujin year (668 A.D.), Silla simply ceased acting as a subordinate state of Tang and gradually occupied the former territory of Goguryeo.

No historical record exists stating that Silla killed either Su Dingfang or Li Ji.

The Siege of Hanseong Fortress

After Tang forces completed the conquest of Baekje and withdrew, the king of Silla ordered his generals to pursue and eliminate the remaining Baekje resistance.

The Silla army established its camp at Hanseong Fortress.

Soon afterward, combined forces of Goguryeo and Malgal (Mohe) surrounded the fortress.

Fighting continued without interruption.

From the eleventh day of the fifth month until the twenty-second day of the sixth month, the Silla army was placed in extreme danger.

When news reached the king, he assembled his ministers to discuss the crisis.

The king remained uncertain how to proceed.

Kim Yusin then stepped forward and declared:

"The situation is extremely urgent. It cannot be resolved through human strength alone. Only divine power can save us."

The Rite at Seongbusan

An altar was constructed upon Seongbusan Mountain.

There they performed a sacred rite.

Suddenly, a brilliant radiance, as large as a great jar, appeared above the altar.

The light then flew northward like a star.

The Earlier Legend of Seongbusan

A man living in the capital desired an official appointment.

He instructed his son to carry a great torch to the summit of the mountain during the night.

The people below saw the distant light and believed a mysterious star had appeared.

When the king heard this report, he became alarmed and prepared to hold public prayers.

The father volunteered to participate.

Another person, however, declared:

"This is not a heavenly fire. It is merely the karmic sign that one household's son will die, and that his father will mourn."

The prayers were therefore abandoned.

That same night, as the son descended the mountain, he was attacked and killed by a tiger.

The Miracle at Hanseong Fortress

Meanwhile, the soldiers trapped inside Hanseong Fortress became discouraged.

Seeing no relief army approaching, they could only look at one another and weep.

As the enemy prepared its final assault, a brilliant flash suddenly appeared in the southern sky.

The radiance struck and shattered more than thirty of the enemy's stone-projectile engines.

The bows, arrows, and spears of the attackers were likewise broken.
Many enemy soldiers collapsed to the ground.

Only after a long time did they recover consciousness, scatter, and retreat.

The Silla army was thereby saved and returned safely.

The Omen of Taejong

When King Taejong first ascended the throne, someone presented him with a remarkable pig.

The animal possessed one head, two bodies, and eight legs.

An interpreter of omens declared:

"This is surely a sign that he will one day unite all under Heaven."

During Taejong's reign, Silla officials first adopted Chinese-style robes, official caps, and ivory tablets.

The Debate Over the Title "Taejong"

During the reign of King Sinmun, Emperor Gaozong of Tang sent an envoy to Silla with the following message:

"My late father, Emperor Taejong of Tang, obtained worthy ministers such as Wei Zheng and Li Chunfeng. Through united purpose and shared virtue he unified all under Heaven. Therefore he was rightly called Emperor Taejong. Silla is only a small kingdom. By using the title Taejong, you presume to use a title belonging to the Son of Heaven and exceed your proper station. Such conduct is deeply disloyal. You must immediately change this title."

King Sinmun replied in writing:

"Although Silla is a small kingdom, it obtained the holy minister Kim Yusin and thereby unified the Three Kingdoms. For this reason our ruler received the title Taejong."

When he had still been Crown Prince, he had read in a certain book that a being from the Thirty-Three Heavens (Doricheon / Trāyastriṃśa Heaven) would be born in Silla and would later become Kim Yusin.

The emperor retrieved that book, reread its contents, and was greatly astonished.

He therefore sent another envoy granting permission for Silla to retain the royal title Taejong.

The Spirits of Jangchun-rang and Pa-rang

Earlier, during the Battle of Hwangsan against Baekje, the Silla warriors Jangchun-rang and Pa-rang had fallen in battle.

Later, while the conquest of Baekje was still underway, they appeared in a dream to King Taejong and spoke:

"Long ago we gave our bodies for the kingdom. Even now, though we have become only white bones, we continue to follow the army in order to protect our country. Yet Your Majesty stands in awe of the authority of the Tang general Su Dingfang and merely follows behind him. Great King, grant us only a little strength."

King Taejong awoke greatly astonished.

For the sake of the two spirits, he ordered Buddhist scriptures to be recited for one full day at Mosanjeong Pavilion.

He also founded Janguisa Temple at Bukhansanju, praying that the two fallen warriors would attain a blessed rebirth.

Notes:

This is a major sky-force passage. Kim Yusin performs 신술 / divine art on Star-Floating Mountain, a jar-sized radiance appears over the altar and flies north like a star. Then a light like lightning appears from the southern sky, shatters enemy stone weapons, breaks bows/arrows/spears, and knocks soldiers unconscious. This is one of the strongest “energy/light intervention” motifs so far.

This page continues the heavenly-being incarnation motif: Kim Yusin is linked to a being from the Thirty-Three Heavens being born in Silla. It also gives a strong warrior-spirit dream intervention motif: dead Silla warriors appear in the king’s dream, still serving the country as “white bones,” asking for spiritual support so they can aid the campaign.

Closing Remarks on Volume 1

With the completion of this first volume, we arrive not at a conclusion, but at a threshold.

The purpose of these translations was never to prove a theory or force the text into a predetermined interpretation. Rather, it was to walk beside Iryeon page by page, allowing the stories to speak before deciding what they mean.

Throughout these pages we encountered heavenly descents, sacred mountains, prophetic dreams, mysterious lights, dragons, eggs, chests, ships, ancestral spirits, and founders who seemed to arrive from somewhere beyond the ordinary world. Whether these accounts are understood as mythology, symbolism, cultural memory, history, or something else entirely, they share one undeniable quality: they were remembered.

Again and again, the same motifs appeared in different forms. A child emerged from an egg. Another arrived in a golden chest. Another came from across the sea. A dragon was opened and a child was found within. Lights descended from heaven. Ancestors returned in dreams. Kingdoms fell, yet their memories survived.

The modern world often asks what these stories explain.

Iryeon seems instead to ask why they were remembered.

As this first volume closes, many questions remain unanswered. That is not a failure of the text. It may be its greatest strength. The Samguk Yusa does not hand us certainty. It preserves memory and leaves us to wrestle with it.

The pages that follow in Volume II will continue this journey.

For now, we leave the first chamber of the Samguk Yusa carrying more questions than we brought into it and perhaps that is exactly as Iryeon intended.

— David Lee Fernandes

SAMGUK YUSA

(The First Volume)

Translation, Motifs, and Research Notes
with Interpretive Analysis

三國遺事

삼국유사

권제일 · 기이편

Ancient Records.
Forgotten Origins.
Beyond Myth.
Toward Truth.

MYTH • MEMORY • MOTIF • MEANING

Preserving the Ancient Record.
Revealing the Patterns. Exploring the Possibilities.

By David Lee Fernandes